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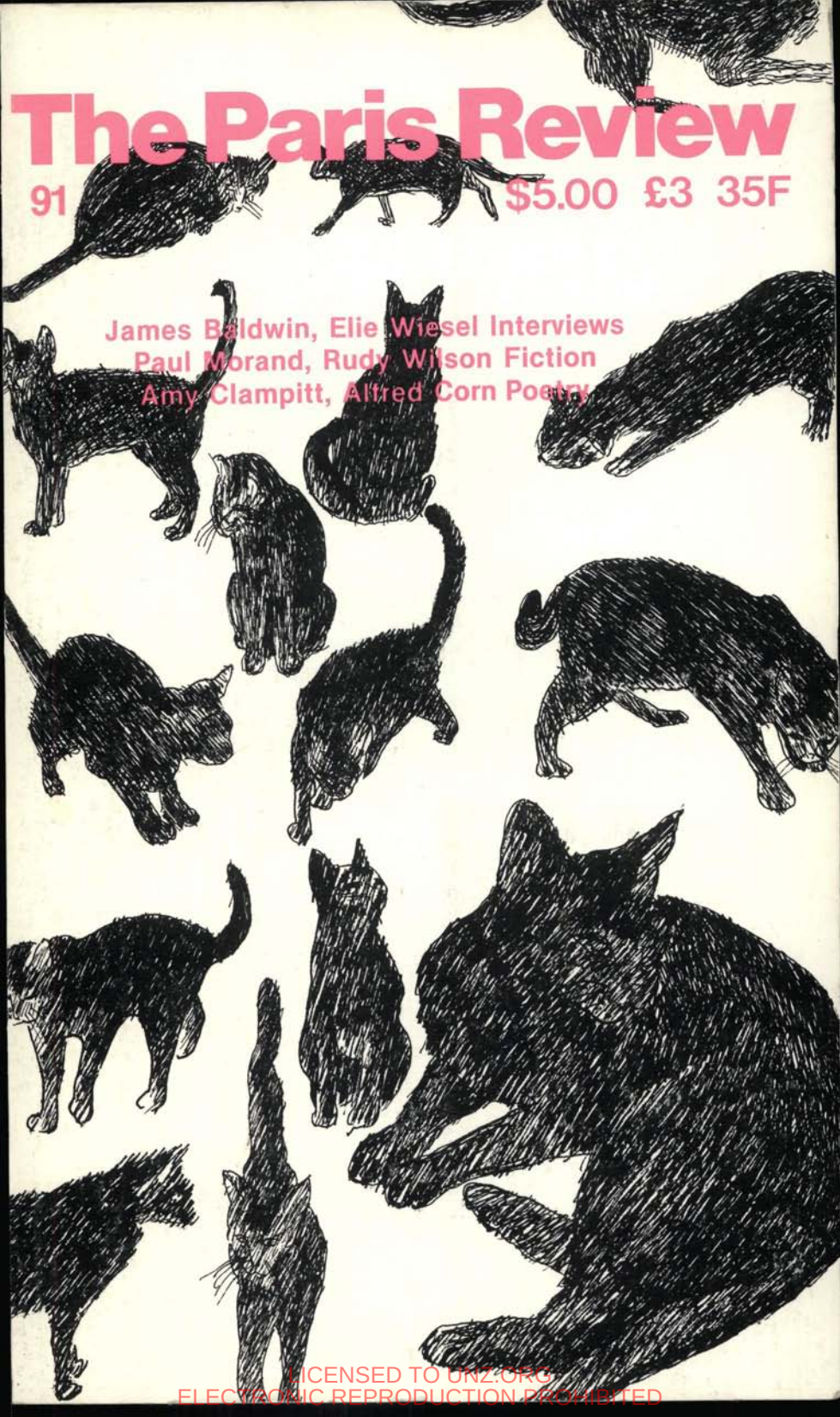

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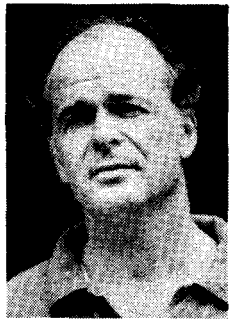
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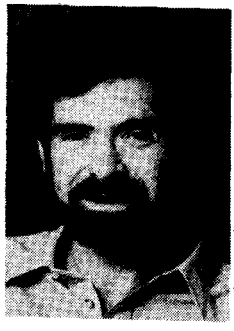
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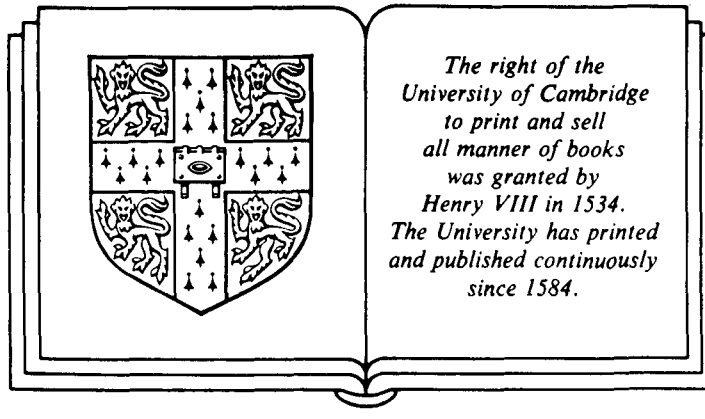

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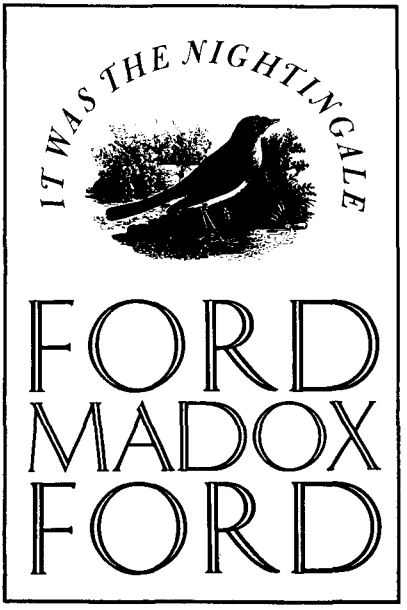

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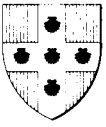

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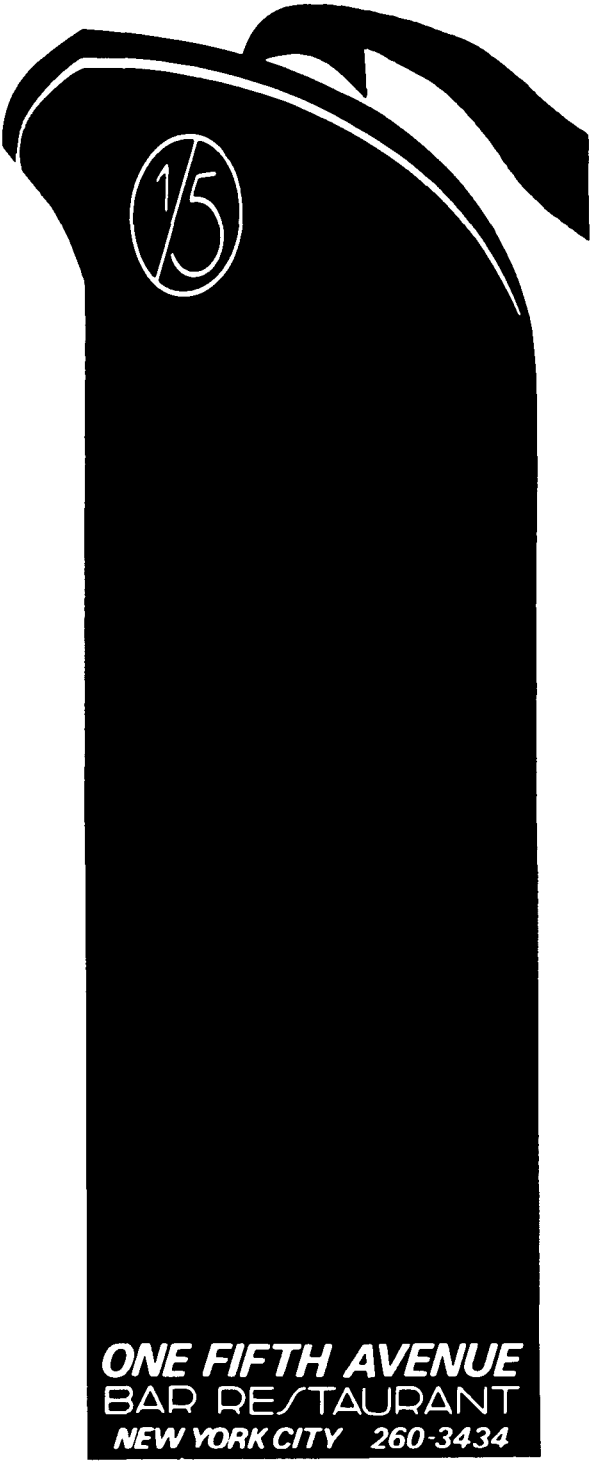

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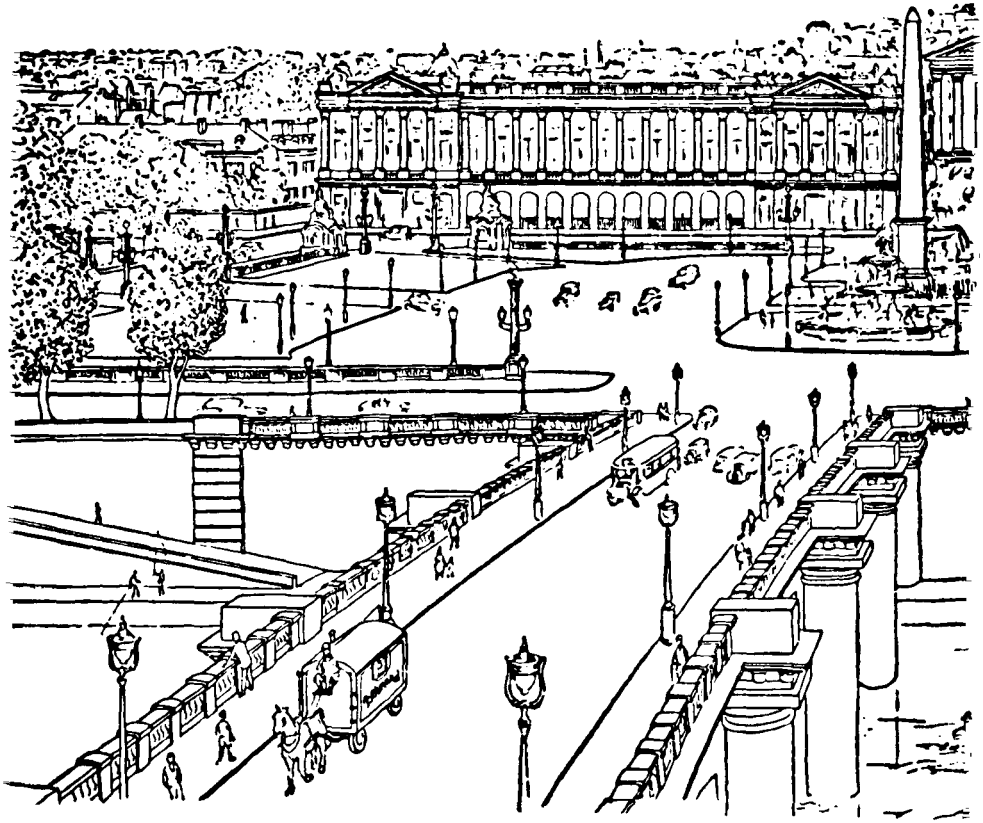

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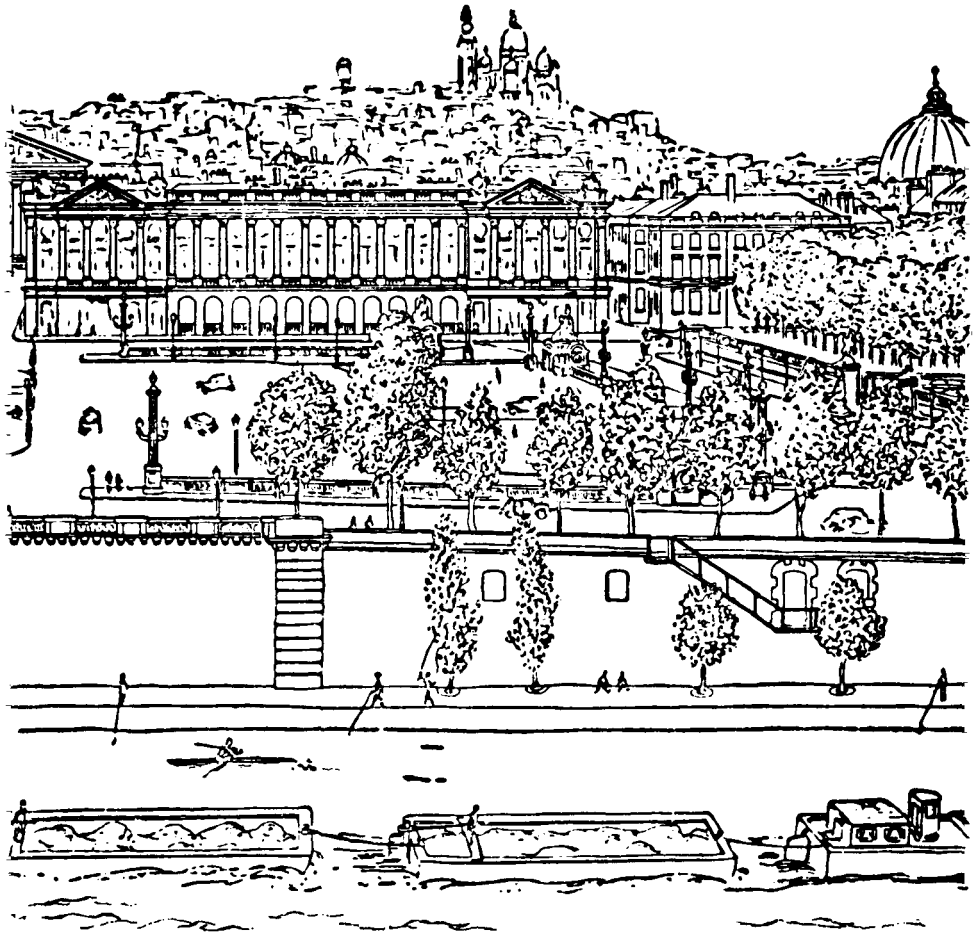

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Impressions

Rudy Wilson

The night Kris was born, two-hundred and fifty miles from my house, I was fourteen, and I had the experience of the white light during sleep. An informal student of Eastern religions and philosophies, I knew it for what it was—the all-encompassing, infinite fabric of the Absolute. I felt I was not of the Earth; there was no time. Coming out of it was like being pulled out of Eternity—Eternity, like a cool ray that blew on. It shocked me, coming back, confined to the body, but I had seen the ultimate. Forever was not so far away. I lay in my bed, sweating, the memory of it fading. I looked out the window at the Southern night. It, and from then on, everything else, looked different to me than before.

"She was born with teeth. I'm calling her Monkey. I half expected her to have a tail, she was in me so long. I swear she didn't want to come out." Her mother, drenched and faded, intense with her black hair stringing wet, held the little girl to her breast. "It's like she was pulled right out of eternity or somewhere. There's such a silence on her."

Her father had been on the front porch for thirteen hours, waiting for the child to be born, noticing the smallest movements of day and then night, the currents from the porch. As he came into the house he thought of her conception in the Gulfport motel room, cold wet bathing suits and sand, where the drinking water tasted so bad. He stood above their bed

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now, looking at his baby. She had dimples above her little hips and the attic fan blew hot air and cicada. "We ain't calling this one Monkey. I've been thinking out there. We'll call her Kristine."

And later, when Kris was still little, when she used to squat down, playing in the grass, her father would put a huge hand on her back, supporting her, feeling her life underneath. He claims to have seen her future on the back of his hand, outlined in the blue veins, pictures of what was to be—little colors of time. I must have been in there somewhere, or everywhere, in between a small muscle or bone, holding on tight, resisting the flow of blood running downhill to the wrist. It was years later that Kris's blood filled up with alcohol, churning and twisting her life into chaos. I saw pictures of that young time, backyard shots of the two of them. He was huge, she stood up to his knee and his wild hair was fully blown, either by the wind or his frame of mind, I couldn't tell which.

Beautiful, outspoken Kris—she inherited her family's knack for making impressions. When she was eleven her older brother was killed when he fell to earth from fifty feet of tree, floating as he fell with his arms stretched wide and his Superman towel flapping uselessly behind him. He hit with a heavy thud and still today people twist their ankles or their knees or their minds when they step into that impression he left in the ground. Her father worked in a bakery. His job was to take the hot loaves from the oven, on racks, spin around and place them on cooling tables behind him. He did that for seventeen years. After he retired some men noticed a smooth indentation in the concrete bakery floor where William Parker had pivoted his shoe over the years. In concrete.

Kris's mother had been hit by a shovel in a riot involving the sexual consent laws of the state of Mississippi. She wore it pretty well though, and it was Kris who inherited the side of her mother's shovel mouth, a nervous twitch that twisted the side of her mouth when she was tense, or drunk, or both, or when she was excruciatingly honest. She talked through those wet, red lips like Mae West and Popeye the Sailor Man and her eyebrows would raise for extra emphasis.

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When I turned twenty-four, still having the white light once in awhile, in fact, regularly on every August nineteenth, a certain girl's birthday who lived two-hundred and fifty miles away, and who on my twenty-fourth birthday was playing at recess in the concrete flat of a Mississippi schoolyard. She used to wear little dresses, some marked in back in the shape of a huge palm. She used to leave her panties at home in her cardboard underwear box and sit quietly on the cool, smooth cement steps, watching the other kids play while she became aware of her sexuality, sitting there, soft, like a little bird. She left two moon-shaped wet spots there, indelibly. Those two spots used to shine at night for those who had eyes to see them, folks driving by the schoolyard on hot summer nights, their Eskimo pies melting, unaware of the steps' dayglow memoriam. It's a funny thing—I noticed those marks the time of my twenty-fourth birthday in the morning looking in the mirror. I was frightened to notice the change in my face. They were imprinted on my forehead and I first took them to be from a rough night's sleep that often creased my face with sheet marks. But last night's dream had seeped out to the very surface of my brain and even further. I dreamt I was chasing a young woman in a brown, weedy autumn field. She was riding a horse and kept looking back at me, laughing out the side of her mouth. I was wearing a grey military uniform with brightly striped pants, each coat button shining sharp in the sun. I followed her, stumbling over a dirt bank. Two red-faced soldiers fired musket shots into my forehead. I saw the smoke puffs as I flew back down the hill. And now I wore the marks on my face—something from her world that added to my already prematurely lined face.

I dreamt of her as my mother, she washed me in the kitchen sink. I dreamt of her as my father. I remember his thick fingers, scratchy face, and cigarette breath. She was my sister and we held each other as tiny children, dirt-faced and barefoot at the shore of a great sea. Often she was my lover. Sometimes I saw her with other boys who aroused and caressed her into swoons. She was half-naked on short, green grass soft to her pale backside, the two softnesses squirming together

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while they leaned over her sensitive body. Her shirt was unbuttoned to just above her navel, her pants off to the side in a heap. Her young stomach moved in a sideways rhythm, reflecting pink sunlight, flat and warm. Her adolescent breasts remained under her long-tailed shirt, creating small upward wrinkles. Her eyes were closed and she held her arms above her head in a circle. I saw her like this often and it would end with me watching from high in the air at a great distance.

Just to say Kris was beautiful was an understatement. "Kris, you are beautiful, like the moon when it's full," some boy would say. "Kris, why, you are so like the Mississippi sky, so hugely beautiful," another romantic boy would say. And, "Kris, you are mysterious like the Biloxi bay at winter night, your face seems to change with the moon tides." And they would take her to the quiet night golf course and feel her, touch her, and love her—hurting her. She so resembled the Mississippi beauty they were all so proud of—being Civil War descendants (weakened from generations of incest). They had strong backs from riding southern belles, their hearts were like the pecan, the state nut of their beloved, misunderstood land. And Kris used to tear at her face and cut X's in her chest. She had to get away from her beauty. And when she was about fifteen it happened.

At the family house on Madison Street, in the summertime when the magnolia and the mimosa were burning the air with scent, Kris and the rest of them used to swing off the second-story porch of the white wooden house in a tire swing, erected years ago by her now-dead brother. Kris was swinging high, father was smiling, his hands on his hips, cigarette in his mouth, eyes taking in the soft, summer day. Mother was spitting out some blood from recent dental work into the dust near the base of the big oak tree. Sister Nattie was dreaming of her sweet lover, Wesley, who drove over from Laurel each Saturday night. So no one was paying much attention when the rope broke with Kris about twenty feet in the air. They did hear the snap though, and their indepen-

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dent thoughts ran away like the smoke that blew out the window from my cigarette resting in the ashtray two-hundred and fifty miles away. They stretched out their arms upwards.

They focused their eyes, ready, seeing her knees and thighs blown visible from under her flapping, cotton dress. They waited. And then they waited. And she hung there. Just a little too long. It seemed in that time that the breezes and the blowing trees stopped, the cars traveling down Madison Street stopped, the blood in their veins, the air inside their lungs stopped. Kris was in the air. She stayed that way, in the air, too long for a southern girl, Civil War buff or not, mind reader or not, beautiful and curved like the Mississippi shore or not. About ten seconds. Then she hit down in their midst, lightly, on her cotton behind. And that was about it.

Everything that goes up must come down, usually, eventually, and so it was with Kris—and father, and mother, and sister Nattie. They just went their ways, into the dark, grey indoors of the house, or into the street, or down to the corner drugstore to phone long distance to Laurel. They were never the same again. Their karma hit the fan. "They fell apart like a bunch of dry sticks in the wind," old Eddie told me years later, "like they had nowhere to go but everywhere, and nothing left to do but die. I don't know what happened. They had a life and then one day they didn't. Just scattered out like buckshot. Kris was the most brilliant, always the most interesting girl in this town. It seemed to affect her the most, like she'd held that family together for so long and now she couldn't keep it up anymore. Some say it was her power. Hell, yes, she had power alright. With those blue eyes she'd look at a man and know him in and out, his past and even his future—that's what some believed. I never asked her about my future. I know what that is already. No, they were a strange family in a way, and they seemed to reach a peak. Maybe it was too high for them, whatever it was—they just came down."

"I heard that she flew in the air," I told him.

"God, I don't know about anybody flying. I heard it too. I don't think anyone believed it though, not even them. They

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just went their own scared ways. Old man Parker drifted away fastest. He took Nattie's secondhand car one summer day and drove out of town. Natalie chased him down the street to the bottom of the hill where she collapsed. A couple of months later she was raped near the town square by a group of boys from Laurel. Her mother hired a hit man, they called him, for eighteen hundred dollars to kill somebody, one of the boys. But he missed. Kris's mother started drinking soon after and going around to different towns, to bars and clubs. She owns a club in Natchez now to this day. And then Kris had an accident and came here to live with me. I've known her since she was born. She was in a coma for three weeks. They thought she was going to be a vegetable or something, but she ain't—not by a long shot she ain't. She don't look the same anymore, of course. Her face got tore up some and her walk is a lopsided thing. It was a head-on collision on that narrow highway out to Jackson—everybody killed but her. After that she sort of sank into herself and her Civil War books. God, she is the damndest, smartest girl I ever knew that way, interested in the war like that. She works here running the register. It never gets too busy anymore. She lives upstairs in the back room by herself. Even her dog died that year. She had a dog called Stonewall, had it for years. I always saw them playing and walking together when she was little. She used to come down here swinging through that screen door in her little blue overalls, barefoot, and she'd take her seat on top of that there pop cooler—same spot everyday. Someone shot Stonewall. He came home with a bullet in him and his old heart stopped working. Everybody got hit that year."

Eddie told me all this one night in his kitchen that bordered the small grocery he owned and had worked for fifty years. Everybody in town knew Eddie. Business was bad, had always been bad. "Hell, if I could collect all the credit I've given, Jeez, I'd be a millionaire." He talked in a high whining voice with cracks in it.

I moved to Meridian, Kris's town, a couple of years after her family ran away, after her crime against the local laws of nature. She was about seventeen, an alcoholic. She worked for

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Eddie in the corner store and lived in the slanted, hot-in-summer, cold-in-winter room upstairs. She read and talked about the Civil War. She was still beautiful in a crisscross sort of way; her mouth and eyebrows seemed to work against each other when she spoke, and her forehead had a wide prairie look to it, like you'd get lost if you looked there too long. Her eyes were a cold lake blue and watery, her mouth twisted, wet, and nervous. I recognized her right off as someone who had a great beauty about her and a lost, jumbled-up power. There was something about her that seemed to keep her detached from the world. She was incredibly subtle, and most importantly, at least on the first impression this was so remarkable —she glowed. There was a light around her and it rubbed off on things she touched, words she spoke. It touched and stayed on certain people's faces and in the air where she'd been. No one saw this but me, at least no one I ever knew said anything to me about it.

The first time I actually saw her was late one afternoon at Eddie's grocery store. I pulled open the worn screen door with the metal advertisement with Little Miss Sunbeam on it. As it closed behind me I was in her world. She was yelling in old Harry's ear, big like a flap of fried dough that could barely listen anymore. He was almost ninety and quite deaf. He had been telling Kris about his food stamps.

"It been ten days now they ain't come, I can't figure it— been eating sardines and Raviolio's for three days and if it weren't for Eddie . . ."

"Yes, I know Harry," she was screaming, "it's just like the time General Longstreet was under seige at Fredericksburg. No food for ten days, no Raviolio's." As she spoke she turned to me and said, softer, "You. Aren't you kinda late?"

"What am I late for?" I asked. She looked at me for a long pause, her mouth starting to work itself into a twist.

"I don't know. For shopping I guess. We close up at six." She looked over at the diamond-shaped clock above the whirring dairy cooler. "You a friend of my sister Nattie's?"

"No, I don't guess so. I just moved here recently," I told her.

"I didn't think so. She don't have any friends, not since she

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was raped. You from Laurel?"

"Nope."

"You ever been in the movies before, you got a look, kinda like a movie star, or a famous in a book?" she asked.

"No, hell no, I ain't a movie star, but you know, you look like a famous person to me. I've seen you in a newsreel." I gave Harry a wink. He had no idea what we were saying—he was watching us from the shadow of the cereal aisle.

"Who, me?" she yelled, and for a minute she stared into space, her mouth opening to the left. "Who you kidding? You never seen that. My mother was in a movie once though. They came and filmed it here in Meridian. A lot of people were in it—she was, and Niecy, and Liba, and Wanice. Even old Oscar Poole and Slick Wilson. It was called *The Daughter of Davy Crockett.* Mom had a small part like everybody else, just walking and stuff. The whole town turned out to see it and I sat on Daddy's shoulders so I could see. It was pretty good. That was a long time ago, so long I can't really remember it. You better hurry and get what you need. I'll wait for you till you're done." And she sat down behind the counter on a worn wooden stool.

As I got my food I watched her through the gaps in the shelves, Harry and Eddie in back drinking coffee. Kris sat still, an empty look coming over her face, her fingers resting lightly on the ancient countertop, waiting.

"Is that all you got?" she asked me when I came back. Then she told me, "I've lived here most of my life and I can't seem to really remember anything about this town or any of the people who live here. I remember my dog, Stonewall, he used to lie over there by the cooler. I can't even remember when I was born. Can you? It all seems like forever to me. Then I see you. You look now more familiar to me than anyone around here, it's almost like," and she laughed to herself, "you're from a book I've been reading over the years. I want to touch you and pet you like old Stonewall."

"What's your name," I asked her. "Who are you?"

"I'm this person here in front of you. My name's Kristine Parker. You can just say Kris. You want a drink?"

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"I don't mind. My name's Wilson Smith. Glad to meet you, Kris." I took the silver flask she offered, uncapped it, saw a wispy glow where her lips had been, and took a drink of straight whiskey. It blew me back on my heels. "Wheew! That was a tough one. You drink that stuff all day?" She gave me another thoughtful pause, her eyes spreading out, gathering me in.

"I drink it," she said. She closed and locked the register, picked her bottle back up and looked at me sideways through brown, hanging hair. "You want to come see my room? I just live upstairs. I got lots of pictures of people, and books and things. You don't have to if you don't want. No one's ever been up there, except Eddie, of course, and once Nattie, a long time ago. Last summer." She took another sip and looked at me, her lips wet with anticipation. She always walked up those stairs alone.

"Yeah. I'd like to. You sure it's okay?"

"Okay? Sure, I invited you. Come on."

"Eddie," she yelled to the kitchen, "I'm going up," and she took my bag and put it in the cooler near where Stonewall used to be. I watched her backpockets up the stairs then we walked down a musky hallway to her room at the end.

"This is it," she said. "And there's General Robert E. Lee and there's General Stonewall Jackson. He's my favorite."

"You sure seem to know about the Civil War," I said, sitting down on the bed, no chairs in the room.

"Yeah, I do. That's a map of the Confederate South, 1860 to 1865. This here," she said, pointing to the wall map, "is Harper's Ferry. And here's Vicksburg. It ain't far from here. In 1863 there was a battle where Lee divided his men and then got into trouble with about ninety thousand Yankees. He rushed an urgent message to the other half under General A.P. Hill. Him and his men were literally running to get to the battle. I like thinking about all those men running with their guns. They saved the day but lost the battle. It was at Sharpsburg, or Antietam. It's been called the bloodiest day on the continent. Stonewall Jackson was probably the best general in the Confederacy. He was killed by his own men by

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mistake. They shot him in the dark. They told him later that he was dying and you know what he said? He said, 'Very good, very good, it's alright.' And they told him, 'The whole Army is praying for you, Sir.' And he said, 'Thank God, they're very kind to me.' After a pause he said quietly, 'Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.' And with those words he died." She stopped talking and took another drink, offering me one.

"I feel like I was in the Civil War," she said. "I'm like the War."

"Whatya mean," I asked her. "What does that mean?"

"I feel in two. I'm cloudy and I'm clear. A fight's going on in me and I feel it in here," and Kris pointed to her stomach that was smooth and rippled flat, that had reflected sunlight in my dreams. "I am so confused. If I feel up, then I come down. If I remember, then I forget. I do things I don't want to do."

Sitting there in her slanted room, we looked at each other. I noticed her plaid blouse, open a couple of buttons, rising with her breath. Her face was divided, one side soft and open, one side tense and nervous. "I like you Kris. It's easy to look at you. Some people you can't even look at. You know, we all do things we don't want to do, sometimes. You seem real to me—I'm glad you're here, that you're in this space you take up, and not someone else. Know what I mean?"

"Yes, I mean, not really, but you say it nice," she said. "You remind me of things. I thought I recognized you when you came in, downstairs. I remember something about this feeling, how we feel, us two. We don't know each other, but I want to. With most people I'm like dead. Most people probably think I am dead."

"Why? Why would they think that?" I asked her.

"Cause I disappeared. I zoomed up big for awhile and then I was gone." She was kneeling on the floor at my feet. As I watched her talk I reached over and pulled a strand of reddish-brown hair from her face, put it behind her ear.

"Want to see some pictures—pictures of me when I was pretty? It was like having a job, being pretty like that. People

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treated me in a certain way—they wanted things."

"You're still pretty," I said. "You're beautiful. Just the way you are. The way you sit there on the floor, how you look downstairs and how you talk to Harry and Eddie, and me—you're so open. You're very unusual, you know?" She touched my hand with her fingertips and held it for a minute, handing me her silver bottle.

"I'm not a prostitute, either," she said.

"What? God, I know you're not. I wasn't thinking that at all."

"Well, maybe I am, I could be. Actually, maybe I am," she said.

"Kris. It's not true."

"Well, here's a picture of me when I was a girl, way before I worked the register—and was a prostitute." She handed me a picture from a cardboard box. "That's Momma K., and that's me in the chair. She was my grandmother. She's gone now. She lived in Mississippi for eighty-four years. She visited us in England once when we lived there. She went to Paris with my dad. Here's a picture of them sitting under the Eiffel Tower. That's Daddy in the French hat. They didn't really belong there, I don't think."

"He looks pretty interesting," I told her. "Is that him there, too?"

"Yeah, that's me and him on the beach. His hair was like a hurricane. He's gone now too. Here's one of me at about fifteen. Out on the golf course where we used to go. That's my boyfriend—he was my boyfriend—Steve Terry. I looked okay then. I didn't always have my hair short, but I cut it that summer. This is Royce, my little brother. He died seven years ago. He fell out of a tree in our front yard." The picture showed a little boy about eight, standing stiffly at attention, his hands down on his legs. He had on orange pants and a pink shirt. He had a blonde, grown-out crew cut. His top collar was buttoned and one of the flaps stuck up and out to the side. He was squinting his eyes and standing way over in the side of the photograph.

There were pictures of Natalie and her mother and more

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of Kris "when she was pretty."

"This is a picture of Stonewall. I had him from first grade. I loved him, he was so gentle and good. He was my best friend. I named him after the General, you know. Here's another picture of me, on the tire swing in the front yard. It probably never should have been built. When I was fifteen I was happy. Everything was smooth. It was like I knew things that I needed to know. I remember it in yellow light, in my mind. Once when I was swinging the swing broke and it felt like I flew in the air. It was the best feeling in the world. My feelings used to be so much that they would spread out like rays and touch everything I saw. It was like seeing myself. But that all ended. I don't feel like that anymore. My daddy, he left, after he said he wouldn't. He took part of me with him in that car that Nattie chased down the hill. I wasn't young anymore after that. Do you mind me telling you all this? Eddie doesn't talk much. I love Eddie but we don't do much talking."

"No, I like you talking. I like the sound of your voice and your feelings. It's warm and easy being with you."

"That's the whiskey, not my voice," she said. "My sister got raped after that, one night near downtown. When she got home she wouldn't let anybody touch her and she didn't want to talk about it—but she was hurting. When she went to bed I got in with her but she wouldn't let me hold her. I lay there in the dark and looked at the back of her head and felt how much I loved her. I cried, but I think I was crying a lot for myself. I just watched her head in the dark. I remember I could see those little dots in the air. I looked over to the other bed and I saw my dead brother, Royce, lying there watching Nattie from the front. He was crying too. He looked at me and even though he was crying he forced a smile at me. He had two teeth missing that made a long dark hole. I looked in there for a long time. He was gone in the morning."

"Kris," I said, softly, "come here Kris, come over here." I was still on the bed. Her bedspread had those little bumps all over it in a pattern.

"Naw, I want to talk to you about this. I feel I can tell you

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these things. I want to know why I don't feel good. I mean I don't feel real bad, it's empty—there's nothing. Sometimes long days, weeks go by and I don't even think anything. I can't remember how I was even living. I read books on the War. I always read about Jackson's famous flank march on the Federal right at Chancellorsville, 1863. Everything seems to come back to that. Reality for me is Jackson's flank march round that Federal right, Chancellorsville, 1863."

"Kris, listen," and I held her head between my hands. "I think it's like waves. Like a jagged line—moving upwards. It depends on what you believe in. You've gone from up to way down, from real high to real rough. But it's growth, towards something, some fulfillment. Some people don't believe in anything, it's all just a mistake, a chaos, no order, no justice—that's the word. There is either total justice or there's no justice, in the universe, that's how I see it. How could it be otherwise, or in between? I mean—just for a moment let's say you were going along fine and then it got bad. Well, I think people create their lives and we have to pay for what we do—and maybe in the past somewhere, you did something, something real quick and real bad and all of a sudden it came back to you. It was just payday."

"How long do I have to pay?" she asked me.

"I don't know. No one knows. But you can't judge the whole by a piece of it. It's a long road. You can't stop in the middle and say stuff about the end. I hate to hear you talk sad about yourself. You're wonderful. You just been through a lot. I just met you but I can see you're gonna be okay. I want you to be. We all proceed along paths we create for ourselves."

"Who said that, you?"

"No," I said, "Robert E. Lee."

"No way," she said.

"No, maybe he didn't. I look at you and I see you as a bunch of impressions—all your own impressions and they are in you, all that's ever happened. They get together and they want, they desire. They desire more impressions that are like themselves and it goes on and on and on. You're making an impression on me now, so I'll want more of you, then I'll want

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more. I think we are all here working to get free of all these impressions from living, so we can be whole and united—maybe with God, or each other. An impression can be so deep that it can create desire strong enough to bring a person back in another time—to be together again."

While I was talking she was unbuttoning her shirt down the front almost to her waist and in the now darker room I could just see an X-shaped scar above her breast and shadows running to her waist. Her hands were resting in her lap. We looked through the semi-dark at each other, at our likeness. There were little sparks when she spoke.

"You know what the guys that raped my sister said to her? They said, 'Go on and take your clothes off or we'll kill you, we will.' And she said, 'Go ahead, I ain't gonna do it. And they said, 'We'll kill you alright and we'll suck your tits until they turn cold—so you go ahead 'cause we're gonna get your piece one way or another.' So she did and then they did." Kris pulled open her shirt now all the way. "Com'ere, willya and keep me warm before I turn cold." And so I did and she leaned her head back so that her neck muscles stood out and the pulsing on her jugular vein could be seen.

I spent many days and nights in that grocery store house, spending time with Kris by the register or sitting with Eddie in back, hearing the screen door slam, watching Kris from the back, caring for the customers. I just watched her and often we'd be still, the two of us in back, my legs crossed easy, sitting, Eddie in his high metal chair, wrinkled hand on his coffee cup, Kris out there on her wooden stool sitting like Buddha, looking out the window. It was like a silent triangle.

Kris's light was all over town, wherever she went. I saw it in the air, in streaks, in buildings where she'd been, even in smudges on the ground where she'd walked. When I held her in her dark room at night we were inside a glowing orb. One morning, walking to her house I saw a red light pouring out of an empty room on the top floor at Eddie's. I went inside and up. I asked Eddie on the way what that room was and he told me it was vacant.

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"Kris calls it Paulie's room—she spends a lot of time in there."

"Who's Paulie?" I asked.

"Paulie was a boy who used to live nearby. He was a big man actually, with the mind of a boy. He used to wander in here in overalls and always wore a sock hat, winter or summer, and black clothes. He showered in his clothes. He used to break light bulbs with his hands—any light he could reach. They hurt his eyes. He went crazy up there in that room, breaking the windows and tearing it all up. Kris calmed him down, was the only one, and after they spent a lot of time up there."

"Where is Paulie now?"

"He's in a hospital, somewhere. I don't know if he's still alive."

"I'm going up there," I said.

I listened outside the door. I heard her feet shuffling and stopping. She was whimpering in between silent gasps, her feet crunching on broken glass. And I heard her crying. I thought I heard her singing. I leaned my head against the door, thinking, "Oh, Kris, I can feel her in there, hurting. Sweet Kris," and I said out loud, "Kris, you in there? Kris, let me in."

"Come on in," she said. "I'm painting my pictures. I'm making impressions in my heart." She was leaning against the far wall. The wooden floor was dirty with glass and dust. The wallpaper was a faded white with little outlined birds on it. "I'm painting the birdies," she said. She sounded drunk and I noticed the silver flask on the floor.

"Kris, you okay?"

"Sure, I'm okay," she said, "I'm always okay."

I noticed her blouse was open. She had a razor blade in her hand and cuts on her chest. She was bleeding, drops in lines were running down her white breasts. She was painting with her finger using her own blood, filling in the outlined birds.

"I'm painting these birdies, don't they look good?" I saw where the red smudges spilled outside the lines.

"Kris, why are you doing this? Look at me, don't hurt

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yourself."

"I got to. I think I'm crazy, I got to let it out of me," she said, "It don't hurt much."

"You're always hurting yourself, everything you do. Everyone else has hurt you, you don't have to keep doing these things," and I started to cry.

"Paulie used to come here and watch me take off my clothes. He'd laugh and laugh and I watched people out this window thinking they could see me." As she spoke she dabbed her finger into the blood and smeared it on the wall.

"Kris, stop, please. It hurts me." I saw old, rusty blades lying on the window sill as I kneeled down, my head running down the length of her body. I held her behind her knees, my face against her thigh. "Please stop cutting yourself, stop hurting your body. I love you. I don't understand this, but I love you so hard, I'm crazy for you, you know I am," and I cried into her thigh, holding her leg with both hands. She sat down on the chair, the only thing in the room. I rested my head in her lap, her hands in my hair and on my forehead. She watched out the window.

"I see Harry out there. He's wearing his hat for riding his motorbike. Harry's afraid of robbers—he's got a gun. I saw it once." As she talked I felt better, my mind always became silent when we touched.

"There's no choice for me about you, Kris, I only love you. I can't think about it, all this. I just want to be with you."

"You're my sweet friend, Willie, I'm glad you're here." She pulled her blouse together over the cuts. "I'm tired." We sat there for awhile, her looking out the window at the blue sky, me looking at her. I stayed there on the floor with her for some time, then she got down there with me on the brown wooden floor. And she smiled and later we laughed and she let me love her.

In the afternoon light, there in Paulie's room, with the empty light socket hanging down, I noticed a whitish scar over her eyebrow. "How did you get that scar, Kris?"

"This one?" she asked, her light fingers running over it remembering. "When we were little, Tracy Eckles hit me with

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a spatula 'cause she said I didn't love God."

"Stitches?" I asked.

"Naah, butterfly."

"Is it true what she said?"

"No, sometimes with you it isn't." I held her close and got deep into the silence and I thought that this Krislife was like a merry-go-round, and I didn't want to get off, and in that whirling silence the wounded birds flew on.

We spent more days in Paulie's room and many days in hers. We didn't leave Eddie's often. Kris sometimes rode off to places unknown to me but usually there wasn't much else we wanted than to be together, detached from the world, alone at the inconspicuous house. The summer was a hot blanket, clear and blue with the yellow sun. We walked at night, quiet on the cooled-down pebbly sidewalks, big cracks in them where Kris and other children stubbed their toes. We walked and watched people's yellow night windows—and Kris was like a little girl, giggling and then hiding the fact. She bit her lower lip and I'd see the whites of her eyes. Often I heard her laughing in her sleep. Sometimes Eddie went out with us, slowly. In the days the dogs panted and at night we touched, looking for cool areas of the body.

One late night the phone rang. I opened my eyes, not yet asleep. I knew who it was. Kris was in Laurel stranded in a bar. She said she was in a fight. Could I come get her? I rode the thirty miles in the black night on the two-lane blacktop. Warm air was blowing and I could see lights near the roadside, places to do with Kris. She had passed this way. I saw a long streak of light ending in a throb. I pulled over to see what it was. It was a dead dog. His head was aglow where she'd held him. I drove on. In the bar she jumped up, running to hug me. It looked very tense in there and Kris had a bloody mark on her face where she had been hit.

"I can't believe this," I told her, "What were you fighting about?"

"Oh, the War. And my 'peculiar characteristics' I guess. We should get out of here now." She was walking real jaunty, dancy.

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"You're feeling pretty good though, aren't you? You'd think it would be the other way around. Who hit you in the face—it was a girl, I hope?"

"Yeah, it was old Tracy Eckles again," she said.

"Aw, man, it was not. Come on, let's go somewhere and get a drink. You are so fine. You knock me out," and I held her around the shoulders, walking.

We pushed into a dark little bar with a few people, some things—tables, a jukebox, and a dance floor with nobody dancing. Kris had a few shots. I leaned back and watched her, just settling in. Each time she threw down a shot she would set her glass down and look at me hard in the eye, holding on.

"I don't know how you do that," I told her, but it definitely made her happy. She got loose and talkative, liquidy. Her eyes brimmed up wet when she said things. The dance floor started to take on a meaning. A small short-haired girl came out dressed in a little body suit zipped up to her throat. She was the stripper and I watched her getting ready for the show. Music came up, people turned to look, and Kris's eyes were wet and her mouth was moving.

"I know her. I knew her since I was in fourth grade. She's Gail Canady. She was my friend. Now look at her. I wish we could take her home," and Gail was sliding her zipper down. "Damn, I really want to take her back to town, how come everything gets sad?"

"She's probably alright, maybe she likes dancing," I said.

"Yeah, I'm sure she just really loves her dancing—everyone else does," she said, as Gail peeled her suit back off her shoulders. She had small, bony shoulders reflecting lights, and breasts that swayed to the music and the onlooking eyes. Kris watched her from her dark seat against the wall. "When I was in fourth grade, Gail used to sit behind me and braid my hair and make me nervous. Now she's making me nervous again."

Men were whistling now at Gail as she leaned forward over a table, putting her hands on someone's knees for support.

"Let's go. Let's get out of here," said Kris. She left her shot glass on the table, half-filled. As we went out I gave Gail a

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glance. She had her bare back to the crowd and was looking over her shoulder at me. I thought she was pretty. I noticed our empty table with Kris's shot glass sitting alone. Gail and the glass seemed connected somehow as the door closed behind me.

A thunder and lightning storm was starting as we moved towards home. In the car the dashboard lights shone and the wheels of Eddie's big car hummed. Lightning illuminated Kris's already softly glowing face. She said, "I was reading about Iceland."

"Yeah?" I answered.

"55% of the people in Iceland believe in elves, did you know that?"

"No, I didn't know that," I said, looking at her with a glance.

"Yes, well maybe me and you—and Eddie, should move there—and Gail. Sounds like a good place."

"Pretty cold. Year 'round. You speak Icelandic?"

"Oh, yeah," she said, "I forgot."

"Kris, don't worry about everything, alright? Gail's alright. She's just living her life. Everybody does different things is all—don't they? I mean, she's just playing her role . . ."

"Yeah, pretty damn well into it, I'd say."

"Well," I said, "that's good. You can't just hang outside the world, thinking. She's working something out. She wants to be that way. She created her life."

"Impressions, huh? She's just picking up more though. It'll get worse, won't it?"

"I don't know. Impressions and desires are real things. Your strongest desire at the moment of death is what brings you back to Earth and gives a direction to what you do. All desires have to be fulfilled, eventually, one way or another. I guess you have to be careful about what you want." We were in a big lightning storm by now, near where the dead dog was. Kris thought lightning was hitting the roof of the car and wanted to pull over. We sat in the flashing light, seeing furrowed ground and those big rolled-up bales of grass to the side of the road, lighting up like daytime. I thought I could

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see the dog up ahead at each flash. I imagined another dog dragging him away, his friend.

"I got desires," she said. "I want to live—more now than before. I want to be a normal person. I don't want people to think I am a whore, or crazy, or a criminal."

"No one thinks that, Kris, but you."

"I'm all tangled up. I want to get free of it all. I miss my Daddy. That's stupid, I know, but whenever I get sad I think of him. I always remember this one time—I'd done something wrong and I worried he didn't love me. It scared me so much I couldn't talk or do anything right. He was so gentle with me then. He asked me to help him, he was working on something in the basement. We never did things together like that. I helped him and then I cried and he held me tight to him. I remember how big he was, how he smelled, and he held me a long time and said my name over and over. I always remember that." She paused, maybe looking at the hay bales. "Lightning's hitting the car isn't it?" She asked me that as her face lit up and I saw her clearly for the first time as the person I had dreamt of and I knew it was her marks on my face.

"No, it's not hitting anywhere near the car," I told her. We drove home quietly with the thunder. She leaned her head on my shoulder to rest. "I knew you when you were little and before then too. Way before," I said.

"Uh-huh," she whispered, sleepily. "I love you Kris." I couldn't say it any other way, but it wasn't enough. She put my right hand in between hers, in her lap, and held it warm. I thought about how much I had seen her change and I thought about Gail and the glass.

I was in another town, sleeping in a motel, the night Harry's great-granddaughter was born. His granddaughter called Eddie's to tell Harry of the premature birth. Harry had no phone—he could barely hear. Kris got the call and the message. She went to tell Harry the good news. She had been up reading about Stonewall Jackson. The house was all dark except for the coolers downstairs by the pay phone. She walked across the street-lighted way to Harry's house, a sleeping, gray, one-person house. Its two front windows looked like

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eyes. She tapped on each window, then the door. She ran around to the side tapping on the wooden walls, her hands sliding along the house delicately. "A little girl for Harry," she thought. She did a barefoot dance for the moon that streaked her hair like milk. She looked in the window making faces. She laughed at her playing and her reflections.

I was thinking of her in the motel. She may have been thinking of me. She felt her bare feet, cool in the grass, and her neck shone from her loose, white, summer blouse. Tossing her hair about in the night, she was like a mare dancing on the deaf man's lawn. She banged once more, hard, and Harry blew a bullet through the window into her forehead, just above her eyebrow in the spot where Tracy Eckles had marked her years before for not loving God.

Harry had forgotten about the impending birth of the child. He never forgot his fear of burglars. He had nothing much to steal, but his few remaining years. He had a Civil War colt replica underneath his striped mattress. Harry was an ancient man, deep lines ran down his face into his neck and clothing. In the gunflash his face was visible in contorted fear. He knew this would happen one day, he had told Eddie. The pictures on the mantel shone for an instant. His granddaughter and husband, his dead wife and his World War II son. An old picture of Harry as a young man stood faded on the end. Somewhere in a drawer was a picture of Harry and Eddie, their arms around Kris in the middle. And before Kris hit the sad ground waiting to hold her, she stretched out her arm backward, her hand spread into a star to break her fall. In her brain she remembered everything and she felt her father's hand supporting her back as she fell. She was dead before she lay down. Her last desire was to live.

Driving north out of town, a few days later, I went down a side street, driving slow, the air blowing on my arm, past the schoolyard where she had sat years before. The cement step was just a dull gray now. Up ahead walking towards me was a little girl, alone. She was zigzagging down the street wearing a red rain slicker with the hood up, anticipating rain. She

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carried a lunch box in her hand and was swinging it back and forth. It was a quiet scene, just her swinging all alone on this big street that curved uphill behind her, and me moving slowly towards her. I wanted to stay there with her in that moment. When I got close I saw her face. She was oblivious to her surroundings—her eyes were looking up and around. She was swinging her head around like the lunch box. I got even with her. I never wanted to get past that point. I wanted her to be Kris so badly, it flooded through me. I just wanted it. It could've been her. I could have stopped, held her, kissed her eyes and held her little hands. I could have put her in the car and then, only then, kept on driving. But it wasn't. The car kept on moving past that possibility, away from the town.

I drifted around the North for a long time—cold country for a Southerner. I worked at what I found. I remained unenlightened, no white light in August. I awoke one morning in mid-April to a snow storm. It had been grey skies for six months. It occurred to me to go home, back down South. I had been gone almost ten years.

I arrived in Meridian to a sweet spring, flowers, soft air, sidewalks run-over with green grass. I got a job as a substitute teacher at the grade school. Things went alright for several weeks, working on and off. One morning, in a class of children, I was talking with the principal. A young girl exploded into the room, her bare, bony knees sharp and urgent between blue knee socks and a flying cotton dress.

"Mr. Johnson," she called to the principal, "they're picking on Kelly again, in the bathroom. They tore her dress and they're pushing and hitting her. Hurry, before they kill her!" He turned, with a little smile to me, "Kelly, our little Civil War girl—an unfortunate child."

"Civil War girl?" I asked him, the little girl watching us with wide eyes. It felt like her whole being was flinging itself apart, waiting.

"She knows the Civil War like she was in it—uncanny. They taunt her because she's different and she has a strange birthmark on her back."

"Birthmark?" I asked, moving towards the door.

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"Yes. She has a large star-shaped mark between her shoulder blades, rather in the shape of a hand. Really, quite an unusual child."

I moved down the hall following the girl. She wore a white sweater and her red hair flew in all directions when she ran. Several bigger girls pushed past us coming from the girls' restroom, laughing and talking loudly as a group. I went in—her friend waited at the door. In a tiled corner was a small girl, maybe nine years old, leaning against the wall. Her dress was ripped down the back. She was crying with her hands over her face. There was a bright light around her that I mistook for sunlight. I noticed on her back the large mark, shaped like a five-pointed star, like it was branded onto her skin. And then it did look like the shape of a hand.

That image gave me strong, electric chills that poured through my body. My eyes gleamed up with tears blurring my vision. The room looked like a lighted vault, or a tomb, with a bright ray coming at me. She turned to me, her eyes wide, lashes thick and black with tears, her cheeks colored red. Her little mouth was in a quivering frown. She ran to me. She clutched me around the waist, burying her face into me. I realized the light was coming from her. It turned my hand aglow resting on the back of her head.

"Hey, Mister, is she gonna be okay?" her little friend yelled, making a big sound in the tile room.

"Yes, she's alright. She's just scared, more than she is hurt," and I leaned down close to Kelly's ear and told her so. "You're going to be fine. It's okay; don't you worry now," and she held me tight, her face sideways to me, closing her eyes.

"Kelly, remember the battle at Sharpsburg when all those men were running with their guns to get to the battle?" She nodded her head up and down. "And Stonewall Jackson's famous flank march on the Federal troops at Chancellorsville, in 1863?" Another nod, and she spoke.

"He rolled 'em up."

"Yeah. Those were glorious days, Kelly, they were really some glorious days, weren't they?"

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Portfolio

Notebook Drawings

Tom Otterness

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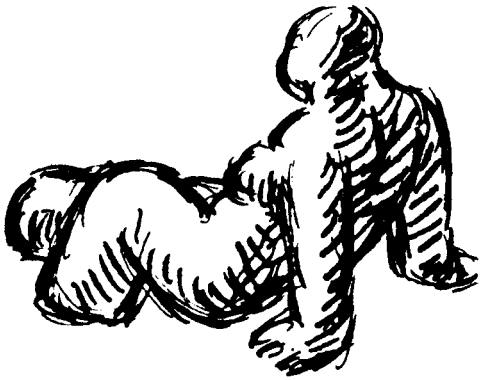

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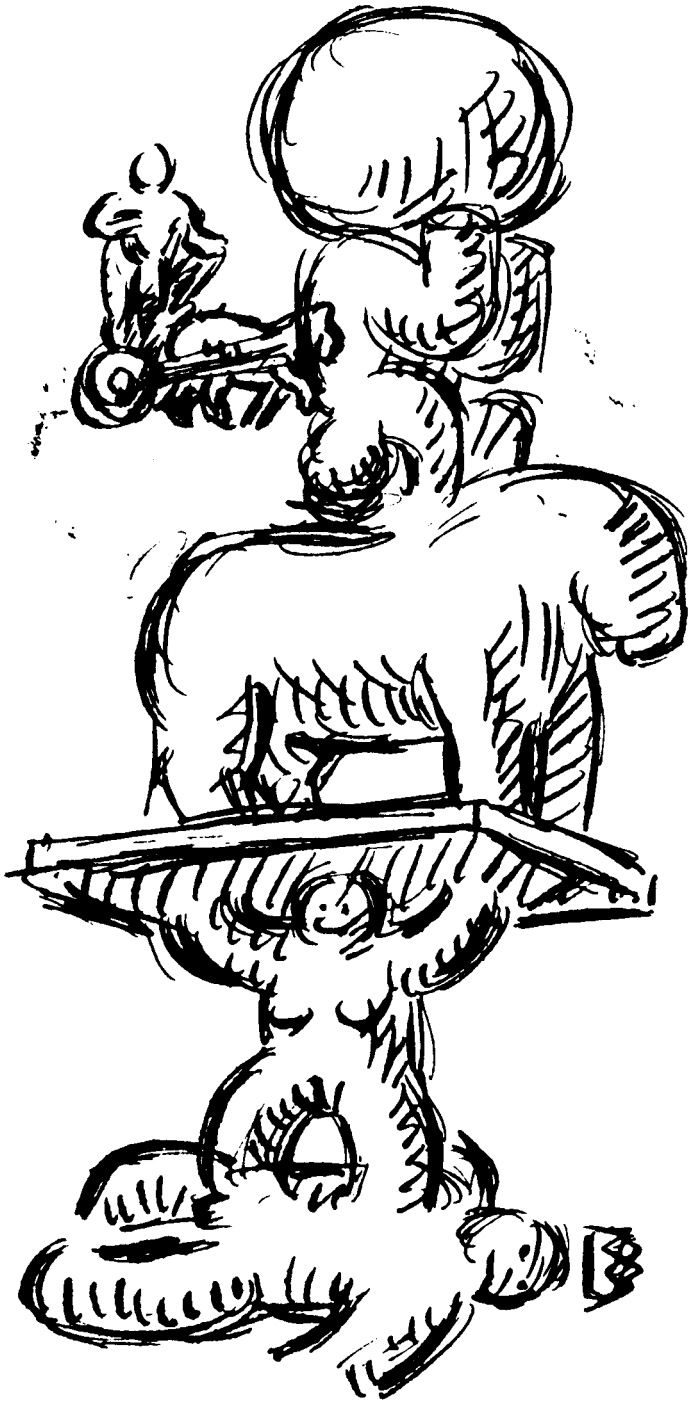

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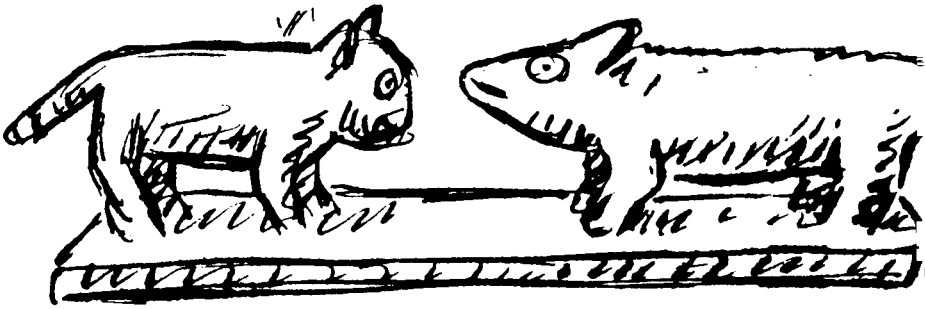

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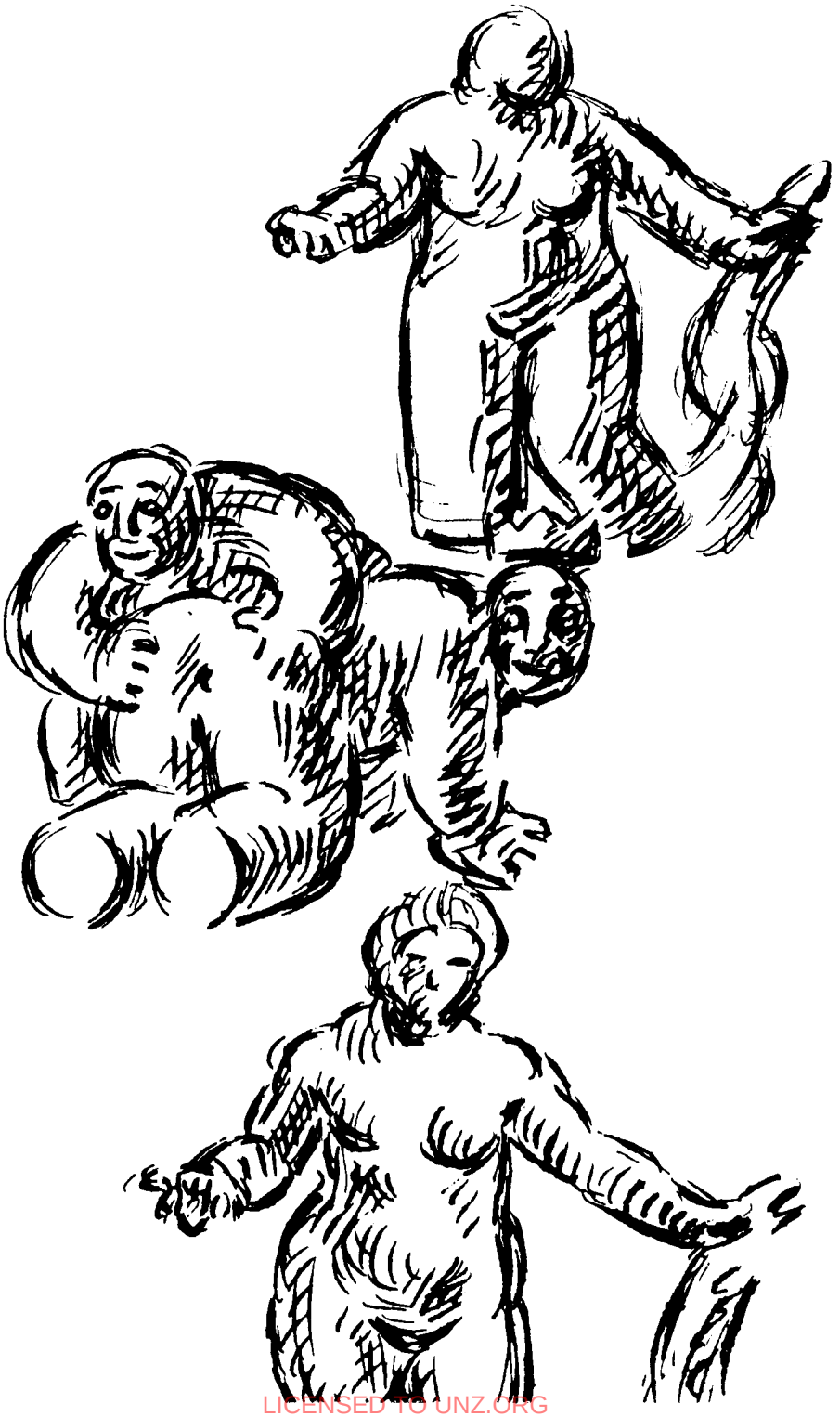

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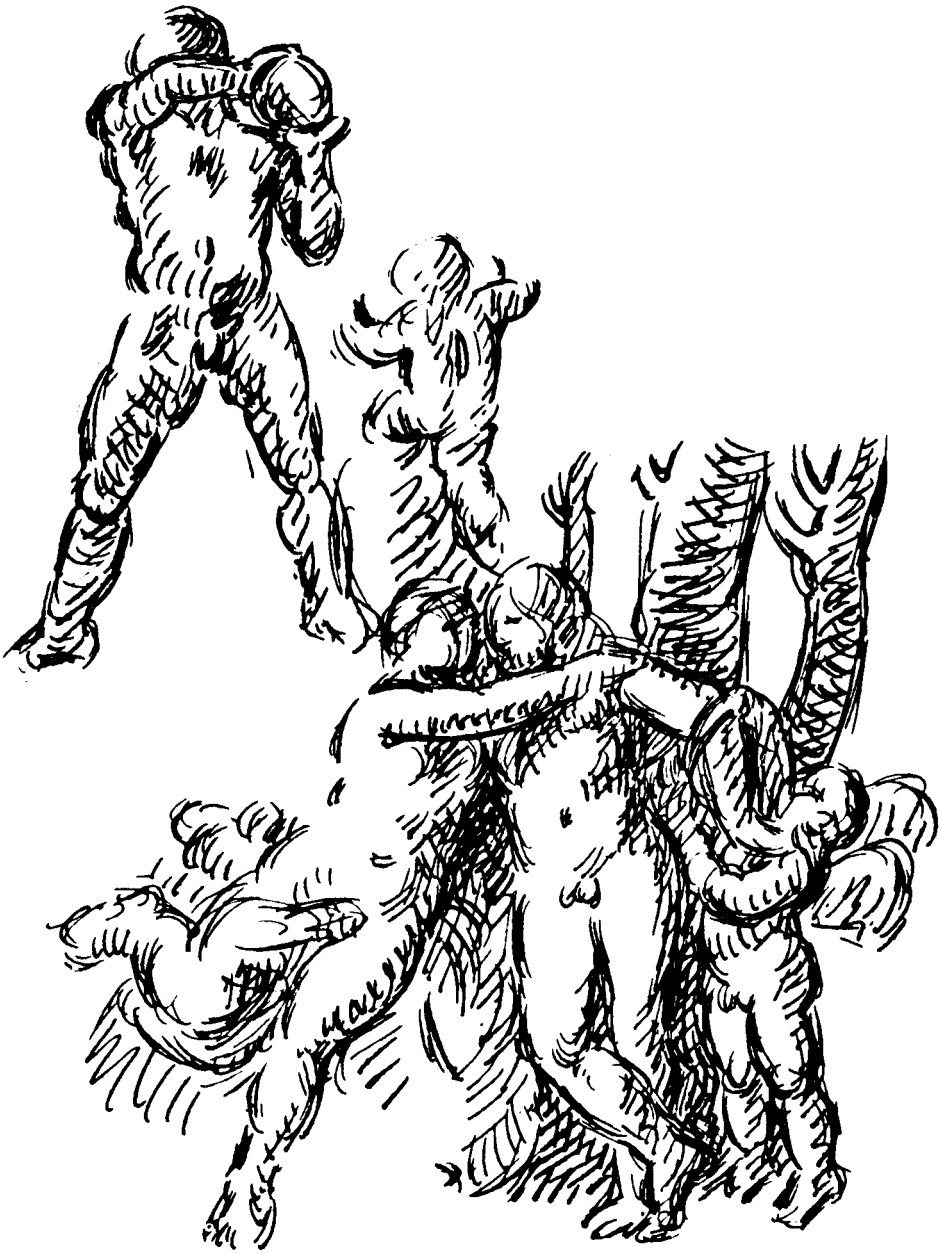

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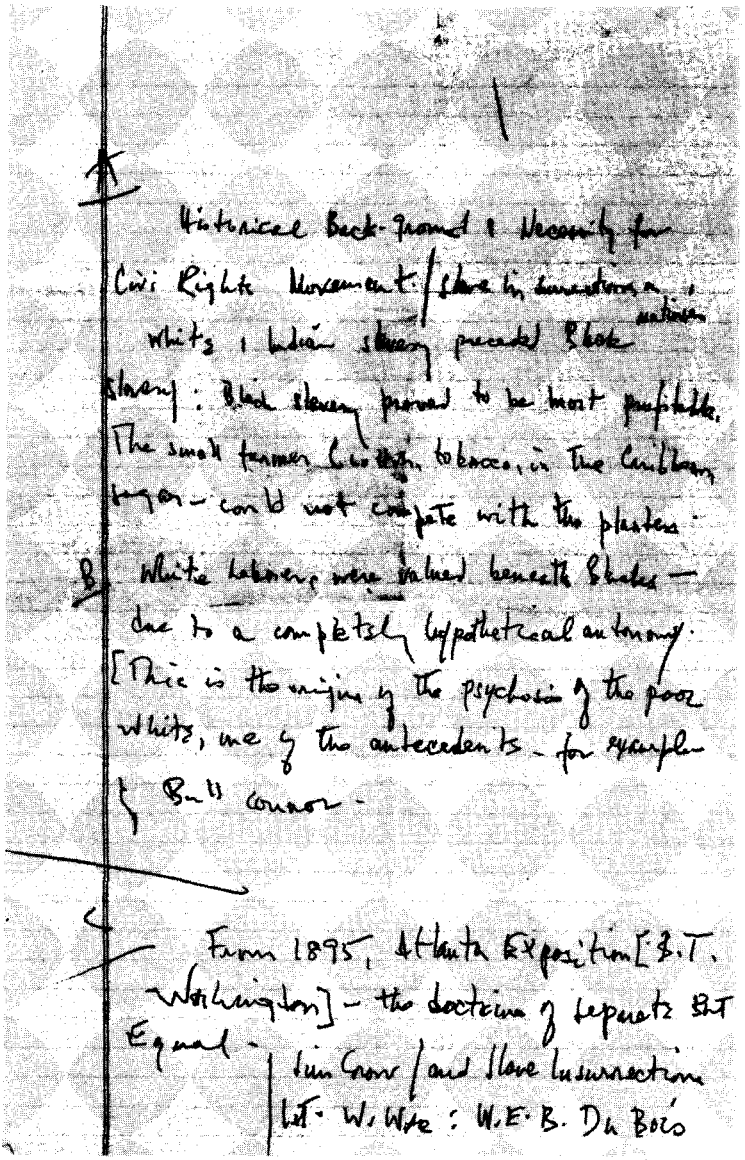
Historical Background & Necessity for
Civil Rights Movement: / Slave in Amerindian nations,
White Indian slavery preceded Black
slavery: Black slavery proved to be most profitable.
The small farmer [illegible] tobacco, in the Caribbean
began — could not compete with the planters.
White laborers were valued beneath Blacks —
due to a completely hypothetical inferiority.
[This is the origin of the psychosis of the poor
whites, one of the antecedents — for example
Bull Connor.

From 1895, Atlanta Exposition [B.T.
Washington] — the doctrine of separate but
Equal.
Jim Crow / and Slave Insurrection
Lit. W. Wise: W.E.B. Du Bois

Notes for a James Baldwin lecture, "A World I Never Made," delivered in 1984.

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The Art of Fiction LXXVIII
James Baldwin

This interview was conducted in the two places dearest to James Baldwin's struggle as a writer. We met first in Paris, where he spent the first nine years of a burgeoning career and wrote his first two novels, Go Tell It on the Mountain *and* Giovanni's Room, *along with his best known collection of essays,* Notes of a Native Son. *It was in Paris, he says, that he was first able to come to grips with his explosive relationship with himself and America. Our second talks were held at Baldwin's* poutres *and stone villa in St. Paul, where he has made his home for the past ten years. We lunched on an August weekend, together with seasonal guests and his secretary. Saturday, a storm raged amid intolerable heat and humidity, causing Baldwin's minor case of arthritis to pain his*

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writing hand (left) and wrist. Erratic power shortages caused by the storm interrupted the tape machine by our side. In between blackouts we would discuss subjects at random or wait in silence while sipping our drinks.

Returning Sunday at Baldwin's invitation, the sun was shining and we were able to lunch outdoors at a picnic table, shaded by a bower that opened onto property dotted with fruit trees and a spectacular view of the Mediterranean littoral. Baldwin's mood had brightened considerably since the previous day, and we entered the office and study he refers to as his "torture chamber."

Baldwin writes in longhand ("you achieve shorter declarative sentences") on the standard legal pad, although a large, old Adler electric sits on one end of his desk—a rectangular oak plank with rattan chairs on either side. It is piled with writing utensils and drafts of several works-in-progress: a novel, a play, a scenario, essays on the Atlanta child murders, these last compiled in The Evidence of Things Not Seen. *His most recent work includes* The Devil Finds Work, *an attack on racial bias and fear in the film industry, and a novel,* Just Above My Head, *which draws on his experiences as a civil rights activist in the 1960s.*

INTERVIEWER

Would you tell us how you came to leave the States?

JAMES BALDWIN

I was broke. I got to Paris with forty dollars in my pocket, but I had to get out of New York. My reflexes were tormented by the plight of other people. Reading had taken me away for long periods at a time, yet I still had to deal with the streets and the authorities and the cold. I knew what it meant to be white and I knew what it meant to a nigger, and I knew what was going to happen to me. My luck was running out. I was going to go to jail, I was going to kill somebody or be killed. My best friend had committed suicide two years earlier, jumping off the George Washington Bridge.

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When I arrived in Paris in 1948 I didn't know a word of French. I didn't know anyone and I didn't want to know anyone. Later, when I'd encountered other Americans, I began to avoid them because they had more money than I did and I didn't want to feel like a freeloader. The forty dollars I came with, I recall, lasted me two or three days. Borrowing money whenever I could—often at the last minute—I moved from one hotel to another, not knowing what was going to happen to me. Then I got sick. To my surprise I wasn't thrown out of the hotel. This Corsican family, for reasons I'll never understand, took care of me. An old, old lady, a great old matriarch, nursed me back to health after three months; she used old folk remedies. And she had to climb five flights of stairs every morning to make sure I was kept alive. I went through this period where I was very much alone, and wanted to be. I wasn't part of any community until I later became the Angry Young Man in New York.

INTERVIEWER

Why did you choose France?

BALDWIN

It wasn't so much a matter of choosing France—it was a matter of getting out of America. I didn't know what was going to happen to me in France but I knew what was going to happen to me in New York. If I had stayed there, I would have gone under, like my friend on the George Washington Bridge.

INTERVIEWER

You say the city beat him to death. You mean that metaphorically.

BALDWIN

Not so metaphorically. Looking for a place to live. Looking for a job. You begin to doubt your judgment, you begin to doubt everything. You become imprecise. And that's when you're beginning to go under. You've been beaten, and it's

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been deliberate. The whole society has decided to make you *nothing*. And they don't even know they're doing it.

INTERVIEWER

Has writing been a type of salvation?

BALDWIN

I'm not so sure! I'm not sure I've escaped anything. One still lives with it, in many ways. It's happening all around us, every day. It's not happening to me in the same way, because I'm James Baldwin; I'm not riding the subways and I'm not looking for a place to live. But it's still happening. So salvation is a difficult word to use in such a context. I've been compelled in some ways by describing my circumstances to learn to live with them. It's not the same thing as accepting them.

INTERVIEWER

Was there an instant you knew you were going to write, to be a writer rather than anything else?

BALDWIN

Yes. The death of my father. Until my father died I thought I could do something else. I had wanted to be a musician, thought of being a painter, thought of being an actor. This was all before I was nineteen. Given the conditions in this country to be a black writer was impossible. When I was young, people thought you were not so much wicked as sick, they gave up on you. My father didn't think it was possible—he thought I'd get killed, get murdered. He said I was contesting the white man's definitions, which was quite right. But I had also learned from my father what he thought of the white man's definitions. He was a pious, very religious and in some ways a very beautiful man, and in some ways a terrible man. He died when his last child was born and I realized I had to make a jump—a leap. I'd been a preacher for three years, from age fourteen to seventeen. Those were three years which probably turned me to writing.

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INTERVIEWER

Were the sermons you delivered from the pulpit very carefully prepared, or were they absolutely off the top of your head?

BALDWIN

I would improvise from the texts, like a jazz musician improvises from a theme. I never wrote a sermon—I studied the texts. I've never written a speech. I can't *read* a speech. It's kind of give and take. You have to sense the people you're talking to. You have to respond to what they hear.

INTERVIEWER

Do you have a reader in your mind when you write?

BALDWIN

No, you can't have that.

INTERVIEWER

So it's quite unlike preaching?

BALDWIN

Entirely. The two roles are completely unattached. When you are standing in the pulpit, you must sound as though you know what you're talking about. When you're writing, you're trying to find out something which you don't know. The whole language of writing for me is finding out what you don't want to know, what you don't want to find out. But something forces you to anyway.

INTERVIEWER

Is that one of the reasons you decided to be a writer—to find out about yourself?

BALDWIN

I'm not sure I decided. It was that or nothing, since in my own mind I was the father of my family. That's not quite the way *they* saw it, but still I was the oldest brother, and I took

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it very seriously, I had to set an example. I couldn't allow anything to happen to me because what then would happen to them? I could have become a junkie. On the roads I traveled and the streets I ran, anything could have happened to a boy like me—in New York. Sleeping on rooftops and in the subways. Until this day I'm terrified of the public toilet. In any case . . . my father died, and I sat down and figured out what I had to do.

INTERVIEWER

When did you find time to write?

BALDWIN

I was very young then. I could write *and* hold a few jobs. I was for a time a waiter . . . like George Orwell in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. I couldn't do it now. I worked on the Lower East Side and in what we now call Soho.

INTERVIEWER

Was there anyone to guide you?

BALDWIN

I remember standing on a street corner with the black painter Beauford Delaney down in the Village, waiting for the light to change, and he pointed down and said, "Look." I looked and all I saw was water. And he said, "Look again," which I did, and I saw oil on the water and the city reflected in the puddle. It was a great revelation to me. I can't explain it. He taught me how to see, and how to trust what I saw. Painters have often taught writers how to see. And once you've had that experience, you see differently.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think painters would help a fledgling writer more than another writer might? Did you read a great deal?

BALDWIN

I read everything. I read my way out of the two libraries in

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Harlem by the time I was thirteen. One does learn a great deal about writing this way. First of all, you learn how little you know. It is true that the more one learns the less one knows. I'm still learning how to write. I don't know what technique is. All I know is that you have to make the reader *see it*. This I learned from Dostoyevsky, from Balzac. I'm sure that my life in France would have been very different had I not met Balzac. Even though I hadn't experienced it yet, I understood something about the concierge, all the French institutions and personalities. The way that country and its society works. How to find my way around in it, not get lost in it, and not feel rejected by it. The French gave me what I could not get in America, which was a sense of "If I can do it, I may do it." I won't generalize, but in the years I grew up in the U.S., I could not do that. I'd already been defined.

INTERVIEWER

Did what you wanted to write about come easily to you from the start?

BALDWIN

I had to be released from a terrible shyness—an illusion that I could hide anything from anybody.

INTERVIEWER

I would think that anyone who could time after time, and without notes, address a congregation would never be shy again.

BALDWIN

I was scared then and I'm scared now. Communication is a two-way street, really, it's a matter of listening to one another. During the civil rights movement I was in the back of a church in Tallahassee and the pastor, who recognized me, called my name and asked me to say a few words. I was thirty-four and had left the pulpit seventeen years before. The moment in which I had to stand up and walk down the aisle and stand in that pulpit was the strangest moment in my life

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up to that time. I managed to get through it and when I walked down from the pulpit and back up the aisle, a little old black lady in the congregation said to a friend of hers, "He's little, but he's loud!"

INTERVIEWER

What was the process whereby you were able to write?

BALDWIN

I had to go through a time of isolation in order to come to terms with who and what I was, as distinguished from all the things I'd been told I was. Right around 1950 I remember feeling that I'd come through *something*, shed a dying skin and was naked again. I wasn't, perhaps, but I certainly felt more at ease with myself. And then I was able to write. Throughout 1948 and 1949 I just tore up paper.

INTERVIEWER

Those years were difficult, and yet you received four writing grants between 1945 and 1956. How much encouragement did they afford you?

BALDWIN

Well, the first one was the most important in terms of morale—the Saxton Fellowship in 1945. I was twenty-one. I was launched into the publishing world, so to speak. And there was the novel, which became *Go Tell It on the Mountain* several years later.

INTERVIEWER

The Saxton was intended to help you finish the novel you were working on?

BALDWIN

It helped me finish the novel, it kept me *alive*. The novel didn't work, but I started doing book reviews for the *New Leader* at ten and twenty dollars a shot. I had to read everything and had to write all the time, and that's a great ap-

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prenticeship. The people I worked with were left-of-center Trotskyites, Socialist Trotskyites. I was a young Socialist. That was a very nice atmosphere for me; in a sense it saved me from despair. But most of the books I reviewed were Be Kind To Niggers, Be Kind to Jews, while America was going through one of its liberal convulsions. People suddenly discovered they had a Jewish problem, with books like *Gentleman's Agreement*, *Earth and High Heaven*, or they discovered they had niggers, with books like *King's Blood Royal* and *Pinky*.

Thousands of such tracts were published during those years and it seems to me I had to read every single one of them; the color of my skin made me an expert. And so, when I got to Paris, I had to discharge all that, which was really the reason for my essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel." I was convinced then—and I still am—that those sort of books do nothing but bolster up an image. All of this had quite a bit to do with the direction I took as a writer, because it seemed to me that if I took the role of a victim then I was simply reassuring the defenders of the status quo; as long as I was a victim they could pity me and add a few more pennies to my home relief check. Nothing would change in that way, I felt, and that essay was a beginning of my finding a new vocabulary and another point of view.

INTERVIEWER

If you felt that it was a white man's world, what made you think that there was any point in writing? And why is writing a white man's world?

BALDWIN

Because they own the business. Well, in retrospect, what it came down to was that I would not allow myself to be defined by other people, white or black. It was beneath me to blame anybody for what happened to me. What happened to me was *my* responsibility. I didn't want any pity. "Leave me alone, I'll figure it out." I was very wounded and I was very dangerous because you become what you hate. It's what happened to my father and I didn't want it to happen to me. His hatred was

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suppressed and turned against himself. He couldn't let it out—he could only let it out in the house with rage, and I found it happening to myself as well. And after my best friend jumped off the bridge, I knew that I was next. So—Paris. With forty dollars and a one-way ticket.

INTERVIEWER

Once in Paris, you spent a lot of time upstairs at the Café de Flore. Is that where *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room* were written?

BALDWIN

A lot of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* had to be written there, between there and the Hotel Verneuil, where I stayed for a lot of the time I was in Paris. After ten years of carrying that book around, I finally finished it in Switzerland in three months. I remember playing Bessie Smith all the time while I was in the mountains, and playing her till I fell asleep. The book was very hard to write because I was too young when I started, seventeen; it was really about me and my father. There were things I couldn't deal with technically at first. Most of all, I couldn't deal with *me.* This is where reading Henry James helped me, with his whole idea about the center of consciousness and using a single intelligence to tell the story. He gave me the idea to make the novel happen on John's birthday.

INTERVIEWER

Do you agree with Alberto Moravia, who said that one ought only to write in the first person, because the third projects a bourgeois point of view?

BALDWIN

I don't know about that. The first person is the most terrifying view of all. I tend to be in accord with James, who hated the first person perspective, which the reader has no reason to trust—why should you need this *I*? How is this person real by dint of that bar blaring across the page?

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INTERVIEWER

When did you first conceive of leaving black characters out of *Giovanni's Room*?

BALDWIN

I suppose the only honest answer to that is that *Giovanni's Room* came out of something I had to face. I don't quite know when it came, though it broke off from what later turned into *Another Country*. Giovanni was at a party and on his way to the guillotine. He took all the light in the book, and then the book stopped and nobody in the book would speak to me. I thought I would seal Giovanni off into a short story, but it turned into *Giovanni's Room*. I certainly could not possibly have—not at that point in my life—handled the other great weight, the "Negro problem." The sexual-moral light was a hard thing to deal with. I could not handle both propositions in the same book. There was no room for it. I might do it differently today, but then, to have a black presence in the book at that moment, and in Paris, would have been quite beyond my powers.

INTERVIEWER

Was it David who first appeared in *Giovanni's Room*?

BALDWIN

It was, yes, but that novel has a curious history. I wrote four novels before I published one, before I'd even left America. I don't know what happened to them. When I came over they were in a duffle bag, which I lost, and that's that. But the genesis of *Giovanni's Room* is in America. David is the first person I thought of, but that's due to a peculiar case involving a boy named Lucien Carr, who murdered somebody. He was known to some of the people I knew—I didn't know him personally. But I was fascinated by the trial, which also involved a wealthy playboy and his wife in high-level society. From this fascination came the first version of *Giovanni's Room*, something called *Ignorant Armies*, a novel I never finished. The bones of *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country* were in that.

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INTERVIEWER

Wasn't it after your first two novels, which were in many ways extremely personal, that you introduced more of the political and sociological counterpoint (evident in your essays) into *Another Country*?

BALDWIN

From my point of view it does not quite work that way, making attempts to be merely personal or to bring in a larger scope. No one knows how he writes his book. *Go Tell It on the Mountain* was about my relationship to my father and to the church, which is the same thing really. It was an attempt to exorcise something, to find out what happened to my father, what happened to all of us, what had happened to me—to John—and how we were to move from one place to another. Of course it seems rather personal, but the book is not *about* John, the book is not *about* me.

INTERVIEWER

"One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience," you've said.

BALDWIN

Yes, and yet one's own experience is not necessarily one's twenty-four hour reality. Everything happens to you, which is what Whitman means when he says in his poem "Heroes," "I am the man/I suffered/I was there." It depends on what you mean by experience.

INTERVIEWER

Nevertheless, it seems that your struggles with social injustices were kept apart as the material for your essays, while your fiction dealt predominantly with your own past.

BALDWIN

If I wanted to survive as a writer I would eventually have had to write a book like *Another Country*. On the other hand, short stories like "Sonny's Blues" or "Previous Condi-

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tion," which appeared before *Another Country*, were highly personal and yet went further than the immediate dilemmas of the young writer struggling in the Village or of Sonny in "Sonny's Blues."

INTERVIEWER

Ralph Ellison said in his *Paris Review* interview that he writes "*primarily* not concerned with injustice, but with art," whereas one might almost find you a sort of spokesman for blacks.

BALDWIN

I don't consider myself a spokesman—I have always thought it would be rather presumptuous.

INTERVIEWER

Although you are aware of the fact that many people read and are moved by your essays, as well as your speeches and lectures. . .

BALDWIN

Let's go back now. Those essays really date from the time I was in my early twenties, and were written for the *New Leader* and *The Nation* all those years ago. They were an attempt to get me beyond the chaos I mentioned earlier. I lived in Paris long enough to finish my first novel, which was very important for me (or I wouldn't be here at all). What held me in Paris later—from '55 to '57—was the fact that I was going through a kind of break-up in my private life, yet I knew I had to go back to America. And I went. Once I was in the civil rights milieu, once I'd met Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X and Medgar Evers and all those other people, the role I had to play was confirmed. I didn't think of myself as a public speaker, or as a spokesman, but I knew I could get a story past the editor's desk. And once you realize that you can do something, it would be difficult to live with yourself if you didn't do it.

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INTERVIEWER

When you were much younger, what distinctions did you make between art and protest?

BALDWIN

I thought of them both as literature and still do. I don't see the contradiction which some people point out as inherent, though I can sense what Ralph, among others, means by that. The only way I could play it, once indeed I found myself on that road, was to assume that if I had the talent, and my talent was important, it would simply have to survive whatever life brought. I couldn't sit somewhere honing my talent to a fine edge after I had been to all those places in the South and seen those boys and girls, men and women, black and white, longing for change. It was impossible for me to drop them a visit and then leave.

INTERVIEWER

You were in utter despair after the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Did you find it difficult to write then, or do you work better out of anguish?

BALDWIN

No one works better out of anguish at all; that's an incredible literary conceit. I didn't think I could write at all. I didn't see any point to it. I was hurt . . . I can't even talk about it. I didn't know how to continue, didn't see my way clear.

INTERVIEWER

How did you eventually find your way out of the pain?

BALDWIN

I think really through my brother, David. I was working on *No Name in the Street* but hadn't touched it after the assassination. He called me and I told him "I just can't finish this book. I don't know what to do with it." And he came across the ocean. I was here in St. Paul, living in Le Hameau across the road. I was sick, went to four or five hospitals. I was very

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lucky, because I could've gone mad. You see, I had left America after the funeral and gone to Istanbul. Worked—or tried to—there. Got sick in Istanbul, went to London, got sick in London, and I wanted to die. Collapsed. I was shipped down here, out of the American Hospital in Paris. I'd been in the region in 1949, but I had never dreamt of coming to live in St. Paul. Once I was here, I stayed. I didn't really have any place else to go. Well, I could have gone back to America, and I did, to do a *Rap on Race*, which helped me significantly. But principally, David came and he read *No Name in the Street* and sent it on to New York.

INTERVIEWER

In an *Esquire* essay, you once wrote that you've been "schooled in adversity and skilled in compromise." Does that perhaps reflect trying to get your work published?

BALDWIN

No, though it has been such a stormy career. It's a terrible way to make a living. I find writing gets harder as time goes on. I'm speaking of the working process, which demands a certain amount of energy and courage (though I dislike using the word), and a certain amount of recklessness. I don't know, I doubt whether anyone—myself at least—knows how to *talk* about writing. Perhaps I'm afraid to.

INTERVIEWER

Do you see it as conception, gestation, accouchement?

BALDWIN

I don't think about it that way, no. The whole process of conception—one talks about it after the fact, if one discusses it at all. But you really don't understand it. After the fact I may discuss a work, yet I'm uncertain that what I do say about it afterwards can be taken as gospel.

INTERVIEWER

One critic suggested that James Baldwin's best work was yet

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to come and would be an autobiographical novel, which *Just Above My Head* was in part.

BALDWIN

He may have a point there. I hope, certainly, that my best work is before me. It depends on what one means by "autobiographical." I certainly have not told my story yet, I know that, though I've revealed fragments.

INTERVIEWER

Are you, or do you remain, very close to your characters?

BALDWIN

I don't know if I feel close to them, now. After a time you find, however, that your characters are lost to you, making it quite impossible for you to judge them. When you've finished a novel it means, "The train stops here, you have to get off here." You never get the book you wanted, you settle for the book you get. I've always felt that when a book ended there was something I didn't see, and usually when I remark the discovery it's too late to do anything about it.

INTERVIEWER

This occurs once it has already been published?

BALDWIN

No, no, it happens when you are right here at the table. The publication date is something else again. It's out of your hands, then. What happens here is that you realize if you try to redo something, you may wreck everything else. But, if a book has brought you from one place to another, so that you see something you didn't see before, you've arrived at another point. This then is one's consolation, and you know that you must now proceed elsewhere.

INTERVIEWER

Are there a lot of your characters walking around here?

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BALDWIN

No, they begin walking around before you put them on paper. And after you put them on paper you don't see them anymore. They may be wandering around here. *You* might see them.

INTERVIEWER

So once you've captured a character in your work, it is no longer a phantom?

BALDWIN

Actually, what has happened is that the character has tyrannized you for however long it took, and when the novel is over he or she says Ciao, thanks a lot. *Pointe finale.* Before *Another Country*, Ida talked to me for years. We get on very well now.

INTERVIEWER

How soon after you conceived of Rufus, in *Another Country*, did you know he was going to commit suicide, or was he modeled after your adolescent friend who jumped off the George Washington Bridge in New York?

BALDWIN

Oh, he was taken directly from that friend, yet, oddly enough, he was the last person to arrive in the novel. I'd written the book more than once and I'd felt I'd never get it right. Ida was important, but I wasn't sure I could cope with her. Ida and Vivaldo were the first people I was dealing with, but I couldn't find a way to make you understand Ida. Then Rufus came along and the entire action made sense.

INTERVIEWER

And Richard, the rather idealistic writer?

BALDWIN

This is all far beyond my memory. Well, there was Vivaldo, whose name I didn't know for sometime. He was called

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Daniel at first, and at one point was black. Ida, on the other hand, was always Ida. Richard and Cass were part of the decor. From my point of view, there was nothing in the least idealistic about Richard. He was modeled on several liberal American careerists from then and now. In any case, in order to make the reader see Ida, I had to give her a brother, who turned out to be Rufus. It's fascinating from the point of view of styles, and of accomodations to human pain, that it took me so long—from 1946 to 1960—to accept the fact that my friend was dead. From the moment Rufus was gone, I knew that if you knew what had happened to Ida, you'd equally understand Rufus, and you'd see why Ida throughout the book was so difficult with Vivaldo and everybody else—with herself above all, because she wasn't going to be able to live with the pain. The principle action in the book, for me, is the journey of Ida and Vivaldo toward some kind of coherence.

INTERVIEWER

Is there a big shifting of gears between writing fiction and writing non-fiction?

BALDWIN

Shifting gears, you ask. Every form is difficult, no one is easier than another. They all kick your ass. None of it comes easy.

INTERVIEWER

How many pages do you write in a day?

BALDWIN

I write at night. After the day is over, and supper is over, I begin, and work until about three or four A.M.

INTERVIEWER

That's quite rare, isn't it, because most people write when they're fresh, in the morning.

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BALDWIN

I start working when everyone has gone to bed. I've had to do that ever since I was young—I had to wait until the kids were asleep. And then I was working at various jobs during the day. I've always had to write at night. But now that I'm established I do it because I'm alone at night.

INTERVIEWER

When do you know something is the way you want it?

BALDWIN

I do a lot of rewriting. It's very painful. You know it's finished when you can't do anything more to it, though it's never exactly the way you want it. In fact, the hardest thing I ever wrote was that suicide scene in *Another Country.* I always knew that Rufus had to commit suicide very early on, because that was the key to the book. But I kept putting it off. It had to do, of course, with reliving the suicide of my friend who jumped off the bridge. Also, it was very dangerous to do from the technical point of view because this central character dies in the first hundred pages, with a couple of hundred pages to go. The point up to the suicide is like a long prologue, and it is the only light on Ida. You never go into her mind, but I had to make you see what is happening to this girl by making you feel the blow of her brother's death—the key to her relationship with everybody. She tries to make everybody pay for it. You cannot do that, life is not like that, you only destroy yourself.

INTERVIEWER

Is that the way a book starts for you, though? Something like that?

BALDWIN

Probably that way for everybody: something that irritates you and won't let you go. That's the anguish of it. Do this book, or die. You have to go through that.

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INTERVIEWER

Does it purge you in any way?

BALDWIN

I'm not so sure about *that.* For me it's like a journey, and the only thing you know is that if when the book is over, you are prepared to continue—you haven't cheated.

INTERVIEWER

What would cheating be?

BALDWIN

Avoiding. Lying.

INTERVIEWER

So there is a compulsion to get it out?

BALDWIN

Oh yes, to get it out and get it right. The word I'm using is compulsion. And it is true of the essay as well.

INTERVIEWER

But the essay is a little bit simpler, isn't it, because you're angry about something which you can put your finger on . . .

BALDWIN

An essay is not simpler, though it may seem so. An essay is essentially an argument. The writer's point of view in an essay is always absolutely clear. The writer is trying to make the readers see something, trying to convince them of something. In a novel or a play you're trying to *show* them something. The risks, in any case, are exactly the same.

INTERVIEWER

What are your first drafts like?

BALDWIN

They are overwritten. Most of the rewrite, then, is cleaning.

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Don't describe it, show it. That's what I try to teach all young writers—take it out! Don't describe a purple sunset, make me see that it is purple.

INTERVIEWER

As your experience about writing accrues, what would you say increases with knowledge?

BALDWIN

You learn how little you know. It becomes much more difficult because the hardest thing in the world is simplicity. And the most fearful thing, too. It becomes more difficult because you have to strip yourself of all your disguises, some of which you didn't know you had. You want to write a sentence as clean as a bone. That is the goal.

INTERVIEWER

Do you mind what people say about your writing?

BALDWIN

Ultimately not. I minded it when I was younger. You care about the people you care about, what they say. You care about the reviews so that somebody will read the book. So, those things are important, but not of ultimate importance.

INTERVIEWER

The attitudes you found in America which made you go to France—are they still with us, are they exactly the same?

BALDWIN

I always knew I would have to come back. If I were twenty-four now, I don't know if and where I would go. I don't know if I would go to France, I might go to Africa. You must remember when I was twenty-four there was really no Africa to go to, except Liberia. I thought of going to Israel, but I never did, and I was right about that. Now, though, a kid now . . . well, you see, something has happened which no one has really noticed, but it's very important: Europe is no longer a

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frame of reference, a standard bearer, the classic model for literature and for civilization. It's not the measuring stick. There are other standards in the world. It's a fascinating time to be living. There's a whole wide world which isn't now as it was when I was younger. When I was a kid the world was white, for all intents and purposes, and now it is struggling to *remain* white—a very different thing.

INTERVIEWER

It's frequently been noted that you are a master of minor characters. How do you respond to that?

BALDWIN

Well, minor characters are the subtext, illustrations of whatever it is you're trying to convey. I was always struck by the minor characters in Dostoyevsky and Dickens. The minor characters have a certain freedom which the major ones don't. They can make comments, they can move, yet they haven't got the same weight, or intensity.

INTERVIEWER

You mean to say their actions are less accountable?

BALDWIN

Oh no, if you fuck up a minor character you fuck up a major one. They are more a part of the decor—a kind of Greek chorus. They carry the tension in a much more explicit way than the majors.

INTERVIEWER

Excuse me for asking, but might your mother be standing behind you while you're writing; is she perhaps behind many of your characters?

BALDWIN

I wouldn't think so, but to tell you the truth, I wouldn't know. I've got five sisters. And in a funny way, there have been many women in my life, so it wouldn't be my mother.

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INTERVIEWER

Have you been through analysis?

BALDWIN

God no, never got "adjusted."

INTERVIEWER

Both you and William Styron (intentionally or not) write about victims and victimization. Styron has said he has never felt like a victim. Have you?

BALDWIN

Well, I refuse to. Perhaps the turning point in one's life is realizing that to be treated like a victim is not necessarily to become one.

INTERVIEWER

Do you believe in a community of writers? Is that of any interest to you?

BALDWIN

No. I've never *seen* one in any case . . . and I don't think any writer ever has.

INTERVIEWER

But weren't William Styron and Richard Wright, say, important to you in formulating your viewpoints?

BALDWIN

Richard was very important to me. He was much older. He was very nice to me. He helped me with my first novel, really. That was 1944–45. I just knocked on his door out in Brooklyn! I introduced myself, and of course he'd no idea who I was. There were no essays then, no fiction—this was 1944. I adored him. I loved him. We were very unlike each other, as writers, probably as people too. And as I grew older, that became more and more apparent. And after that was Paris.

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INTERVIEWER

And Styron?

BALDWIN

Well, as I was saying, Bill is a friend of mine who happens to be a writer.

INTERVIEWER

Did you take a position on his book about Nat Turner?

BALDWIN

I did. My position, though, is that I will not tell another writer what to write. If you don't like their alternative, write yours. I admired him for confronting it, and the result. It brought in the whole enormity of the issue of history versus fiction, fiction versus history, and which is which. . . . He writes out of reasons similar to mine: about something which hurt him and frightened him. When I was working on *Another Country* and Bill was working on *Nat Turner*, I stayed in his guest house for five months. His hours and mine are very different. I was going to bed at dawn, Bill was just coming up to his study to go to work; his hours going on as mine went off. We saw each other at suppertime.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of conversations would you hold?

BALDWIN

We never spoke about our work, or very rarely. It was a wonderful time in my life, but not at all literary. We sang songs, drank a little too much, and on occasion chatted with the people who were dropping in to see us. We had a certain common inheritance in terms of the music.

INTERVIEWER

What sort of music are you hearing while in the immediate process of writing? Do you experience anything physical or emotional?

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BALDWIN

No. I'm very cold; cold probably isn't the word I want: *controlled.* Writing for me must be a very controlled exercise, formed by passions and hopes. That is the only reason you get through it, otherwise you may as well do something else. The act of writing itself is cold.

INTERVIEWER

I'm going to presage my own question. Most of the novelists I've spoken to claim they read exceedingly fewer contemporary novels, but find themselves drawn to plays, history, memoirs, biographies, and poetry. I believe this is true for you as well.

BALDWIN

In my case it is due to the fact that I'm always doing some kind of research. And yes, I read many plays and a lot of poetry as a kind of apprenticeship. You are fascinated, I am fascinated by a certain *optic*—a process of seeing things. Reading Emily Dickinson, for example, and others who are quite far removed from one's ostensible daily concerns, or obligations. They are freer, for that moment, than you are partly because they are dead. They may also be a source of strength. Contemporary novels are part of a universe in which you have a certain role and a certain responsibility. And, of course, an unavoidable curiosity.

INTERVIEWER

You read contemporary novels out of a sense of responsibility?

BALDWIN

In a way. At any rate, few novelists interest me—which has nothing to do with their values. I find most of them too remote for me. The world of John Updike, for instance, does not impinge on my world. On the other hand, the world of John Cheever *did* engage me. Obviously, I'm not making a very significant judgment about Updike. It's entirely subjective, what I'm saying. In the main, the concerns of most white

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Americans (to use *that* phrase) are boring, and terribly, terribly self-centered. In the worst sense. Everything is contingent, of course, on what you take yourself to be.

INTERVIEWER

Are you suggesting they are less concerned, somehow, with social injustice?

BALDWIN

No, no, you see, I don't want to make that kind of dichotomy. I'm not asking that anybody get on picket lines or take positions. That is entirely a private matter. What I'm saying has to do with the concept of the self, and the nature of self-indulgence which seems to me to be terribly strangling, and so limited it finally becomes sterile.

INTERVIEWER

And yet in your own writing you deal with personal experiences quite often.

BALDWIN

Yes, but—and here I'm in trouble with the language again—it depends upon how you conceive of yourself. It revolves, surely, around the multiplicity of your connections. Obviously you can only deal with your life and work from the vantage point of your self. There isn't any other vantage point, there is no other point of view. I can't say about any of my characters that they are utter fictions. I do have a sense of what nagged my attention where and when; even in the dimmest sense I know how a character impinged on me in reality, in what we call reality, the daily world. And then, of course, imagination has something to do with it. But it has got to be triggered by something, it cannot be triggered by itself.

INTERVIEWER

What is it about Emily Dickinson that moves you?

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BALDWIN

Her use of language, certainly. Her solitude, as well, and the style of that solitude. There is something very moving and in the best sense funny. She isn't solemn. If you really want to know something about solitude, become famous. That is the turn of the screw. That solitude is practically insurmountable. Years ago I thought to be famous would be a kind of ten-day wonder, and then I could go right back to life as usual. But people treat you differently before you realize it. You see it in the wonder and the worry of your intimates. On the other side of that is a great responsibility.

INTERVIEWER

Is one's past cluttered, as a celebrated writer?

BALDWIN

There are many witnesses to my past, people who've disappeared, people who are dead, whom I loved. But I don't feel there are any ghosts, any regrets. I don't feel that kind of melancholy at all. No nostalgia. Everything is always around and before you. Novels that haven't worked, loves, struggles. And yet it all gives you something of immeasurable power.

INTERVIEWER

This brings us to your concern with reality as being history, with seeing the present shaded by everything which occurred in a person's past. James Baldwin has always been bound by his past, and his future. At forty, you said you felt much older than that.

BALDWIN

That is one of those things a person says at forty, at forty especially. It was a great shock to me, forty. And I did feel much older than that. Responding to history, I think a person is in sight of his or her death around the age of forty. You see it coming. You are not in sight of your death at thirty, less so at twenty-five. You are struck by the fact of your mortality, that it is unlikely you'll live another forty years. So time alters you, actually becoming either an enemy or a friend.

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INTERVIEWER

You seem very troubled—but not by death?

BALDWIN

Yes, true, but not at all by death. I'm troubled over getting my work done and over all the things I've not learned. It's useless to be troubled by death, because then, of course, you can't live at all.

INTERVIEWER

"Essentially, America has not changed that much," you told the *New York Times* when *Just Above My Head* was being published. Have *you?*

BALDWIN

In some ways I've changed precisely because America has not. I've been forced to change in some ways. I had a certain expectation for my country years ago, which I know I don't have now.

INTERVIEWER

Yes, before 1968, you said, "I love America."

BALDWIN

Long before then. I still do, though that feeling has changed in the face of it. I think that it is a spiritual disaster to pretend that one *doesn't* love one's country. You may disapprove of it, you may be forced to leave it, you may live your whole life as a battle, yet I don't think you can escape it. There isn't any other place to go—you don't pull up your roots and put them down someplace else. At least not in a single lifetime, or, if you do, you'll be aware of precisely what it means, knowing that your real roots are always elsewhere. If you try to pretend you don't see the immediate reality that formed you I think you'll go blind.

INTERVIEWER

As a writer, are there any particular battles you feel you've won?

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BALDWIN

The battle of becoming a writer at all! "I'm going to be a great writer when I grow up," I used to tell my mother when I was a little boy. And I'm still going to be a great writer when I grow up.

INTERVIEWER

What do you tell younger writers who come to you with the usual desperate question: How do I become a writer?

BALDWIN

Write. Find a way to keep alive and write. There is nothing else to say. If you are going to be a writer there is nothing I can say to stop you; if you're not going to be a writer nothing I can say will help you. What you really need at the beginning is somebody to let you know that the effort is real.

INTERVIEWER

Can you discern talent in someone?

BALDWIN

Talent is insignificant. I know a lot of talented ruins. Beyond talent lie all the usual words: discipline, love, luck, but, most of all, endurance.

INTERVIEWER

Would you suggest that a young writer from a minority consecrate himself to that minority, or is his first obligation his own self-realization as a writer?

BALDWIN

Your self and your people are indistinguishable from each other, really, in spite of the quarrels you may have, and your people are all people.

INTERVIEWER

Wasn't *Giovanni's Room* partially an attempt to break down these divisions, pointing out that David could be white, black, or yellow?

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BALDWIN

Certainly, for in terms of what happened to him, none of that mattered at all.

INTERVIEWER

Yet, later on, notably in the case of Rufus and *Another Country*, one's race becomes essential to your story.

BALDWIN

Important in that particular novel, yes, but *Another Country* is called that because it is trying to convey the reality of that country. The story would be different if it were in France, or even in England.

INTERVIEWER

What is your present relationship with people like Ralph Ellison, Imamu Baraka (Leroi Jones) or Eldridge Cleaver?

BALDWIN

I never had a relationship with Cleaver. I was in difficulties because of Cleaver, which I didn't want to talk about then, and don't wish to discuss now. My real difficulty with Cleaver, sadly, was visited on me by the kids who were following him, while he was calling me a faggot and the rest of it. I would come to a town to speak, Cleveland, let's say, and he would've been standing on the very same stage a couple of days earlier. I had to try to undo the damage I considered he was doing. I was handicapped with *Soul On Ice*, because what I might have said in those years about Eldridge would have been taken as an answer to his attack on me. So I never answered it, and I'm not answering it now. Cleaver reminded me of an old Baptist minister I used to work with when I was in the pulpit. I never trusted him at all. As for Baraka, he and I have had a stormy time too, but we're very good friends now.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read each other's work?

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BALDWIN

Yes—at least I read his. And as for Ralph, I haven't seen him in many years.

INTERVIEWER

You haven't corresponded at all?

BALDWIN

No. I gather Ralph did not like what he considered I was doing to myself on the civil rights road. And so, we haven't seen each other.

INTERVIEWER

If you were both to meet over lunch tomorrow, what might you talk about?

BALDWIN

I'd love to meet him for lunch tomorrow, and share a bottle of bourbon, and probably talk about the last twenty years we haven't seen each other. I have nothing against him in any case. And I love his great book. We disagreed about tactics, I suppose. But I had to go through the civil rights movement and I don't regret it at all. And those people trusted me. There was something very beautiful about that period, something life-giving for me to be there, to march, to be a part of a sit-in, to see it through my own eyes.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think that now blacks and whites can write about each other, honestly and convincingly?

BALDWIN

Yes, though I have no overwhelming evidence in hand. But I think of the impact of spokespersons like Toni Morrison and other younger writers. I believe what one has to do as a Black American is to take white history, or history as written by whites, and claim it all—including Shakespeare.

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INTERVIEWER

"What other people write about me is irrelevant," you once wrote in *Essence.* Was that meant to go unqualified; do you not relate to criticism in any way?

BALDWIN

It is never entirely true that you don't give a shit what others say about you, but you must throw it out of your mind. I went through a very trying period, after all, where on one side of town I was an Uncle Tom and on the other the Angry Young Man. It could make one's head spin, the number of labels that have been attached to me. And it was inevitably painful, and surprising, and indeed, bewildering. I *do* care what certain people think about me.

INTERVIEWER

But not literary critics?

BALDWIN

Literary critics cannot be one's concern. Ideally, however, what a critic can do is indicate where you've been excessive or unclear. As far as any sort of public opinion is a question, I would say that one cannot possibly react to any of it. Things may be said which hurt, and you don't like it, but what are you to do? Write a White Paper, or a Black Paper, defending yourself? You can't do that.

INTERVIEWER

You have often left your home in St. Paul, returning to America and going on the road. Do you feel comfortable as a speaker?

BALDWIN

I have never felt comfortable as a speaker, no.

INTERVIEWER

You feel more at ease behind the typewriter?

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BALDWIN

Well, certainly, although I used to be a preacher, which helps on the road.

INTERVIEWER

Can you talk a little more about your relationship to Richard Wright, under whose aegis you received your first writing grant?

BALDWIN

As I said before, I just knocked on his door in New York. I was nineteen. And he was very nice. The only trouble was I didn't drink in those years. He drank bourbon. Now, I'm going to save you the trouble of asking me about writers and alcohol: I don't know any writers who don't drink. Everybody I've been close to drinks. But you don't drink while you're working. It's funny, because it is all a reflex, like lighting a cigarette. Your drink is made and then you go off to another place. When you finally get back to the drink it's mainly water. And the cigarette has gone out. Talking about Richard and our early hostile period, which I thought was ridiculously blown out of proportion, I should say that when I thought I was dealing with Richard, I was in fact thinking of Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Richard's *Native Son* was the only contemporary representation there was of a black person in America. One of the reasons I wrote what I did about the book is a technical objection, which I uphold today. I could not accept the performance of the lawyer at the end of the book. I was very explicit about that. I think it was simply absurd to talk about this monster created by the American public, and then expect the public to save it! Altogether, I found it too simple-minded. Insofar as the American public creates a monster, they are not about to recognize it. You create a monster and destroy it. It is part of the American way of life, if you like. I reserve, in any case, the utmost respect for Richard, especially in light of his posthumous work, which I believe is his greatest novel, *Lawd Today*. Look it up.

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INTERVIEWER

Is there any resistance today to black writers in publishing houses?

BALDWIN

There is an enormous resistance, though it differs from Wright's time. When I was young, the joke was "How many niggers you got at your plantation?" Or, more snidely, "How many niggers you got at your publishing house?" And some had one, most had none. That's not true now.

INTERVIEWER

How does it strike you that in many circles James Baldwin is known as a prophetic writer?

BALDWIN

I don't try to be prophetic, as I don't sit down to write literature. It is simply this: a writer has to take all the risks of putting down what he sees. No one can tell him about that. No one can control that reality. It reminds me of something Pablo Picasso was supposed to have said to Gertrude Stein while he was painting her portrait. Gertrude said, "I don't look like that." And Picasso replied, "You will." And he was right.

—**Jordan Elgrably**

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Hayden Carruth

"The World as Will and Representation"

When I consider the children of the middle class
as representations of phenomena to my subject sense
I can hardly see them at all, they fade
into the shrubbery, of which a superabundance
is *sui generis* their world. I am likely to be overwhelmed,
or distracted, leaning my mind on some green bosom.
But then they are things-in-themselves, these children,
and their glee is a thing-in-itself, their exuberance
as they terrorize one another, wiping themselves out
in a continuum of destruction, themselves
as surrogates of parents. But the parents remain
representations, never things-in-themselves, only
shadow-figures taking out the garbage; and thus
the Will of Schopenhauer's essay leaps out at me
in children-in-themselves, starker than stones or stars,
so that I cower; for the future is theirs, day by day
they remove it from the plastic wrap of not-being
and leave it on the death-strewn lawns. Yes, if will
is all we know of ourselves as things, and thence
of all things, how can I not infer a radical divergence
of degree between everything else and children? The spirea
dies, the little nebulae of viburnum wink out in willing
whatness, but the children's shrieks of bliss and triumph
are merciless, raging from another world, another time,
in causalities I cannot properly discern or identify,
so that all understanding is blocked and thrust back
as mere knowledge, odious data, nauseating
demonstrations,
these relentless present children of the middle class.

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Amy Clampitt

Grasmere

Rainstorms that blacken like a headache
where mosses thicken, and the mornings
smell of jonquils, the stillness
of hung fells thronged with the primaveral
noise of waterfalls—contentment
pours in spate from every slope; the lake fills,
the kingcups drown, and still it rains,
the sheep graze, their black lambs bounce
and skitter in the wet: such weather
one cannot say, here, why
one is still so happy.

Cannot say, except it's both so wild
and so tea-cozy cozy, so snugly
lush, so English.

A run-into-the-ground complacency nonetheless
is given pause here. At Dove Cottage
dark rooms bloom with coal fires; the backstairs
escape hatch into a precipitous small orchard
still opens; bedded cowslips, primroses,
fritillaries' checkered, upside-down
brown tulips still flourish where
the great man fled the neighbors:
a crank ("Ye torrents, with
your strong and constant voice, protest
your wrong," he cried—i.e., against the Kendal-

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to-Windermere railway). By middle age a Tory,
a somewhat tedious egotist even (his wild
oats sown abroad) when young: "He cannot," his sister
had conceded, "be so pleasing as my
fondness makes him"—a coda
to the epistolary cry, "Oh Jane
the last time we were together he
won my affection . . ." What gives one
pause, here—otherwise one might not
care, as one finds one does,
for William Wordsworth—
is Dorothy.

"Wednesday. . . . He read me his poem. After dinner
he made a pillow of my shoulder—I read to him
and my Beloved slept."

The upstairs bedroom where the roof leaked
and the chimney smoked, the cool buttery
where water runs, still voluble, under the flagstones;
the room she settled into after his marriage
to Mary Hutchinson, and shared with, as
the family grew, first one, then
two of the children; the newsprint
she papered it with for warmth (the circle
of domestic tranquillity cannot
guard her who sleeps single
from the Cumbrian cold) still legible:
such was the dreamed-of place, so long
too much to hope for. "It was in winter
(at Christmas) when he was last at Forncett,
and every day as soon as we rose from dinner
we used to pace the gravel in the Garden
till six o'clock." And this,
transcribed for Jane alone from
one of his letters: "Oh my dear, dear Sister
with what transport shall I again
meet you, with what rapture . . ." The orphan
dream they'd entertained, that she had named

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The Day of My Felicity: to live
together under the same roof,
in the same house. Here,
at Dove Cottage.

"A quiet night. The fire flutters, and
the watch ticks. I hear nothing else
save the breathing of my Beloved . . ."

Spring, when it arrived again, would bring
birch foliage filmy as the bridal veil
she'd never wear; birds singing; the sacred stain
of bluebells on the hillsides; fiddleheads
uncoiling in the brakes, inside each coil
a spine of bronze, pristinely hoary;
male, clean-limbed ash trees whiskered
with a foam of pollen; bridelike
above White Moss Common, a lone wild cherry
candle-mirrored in the pewter of the lake.
On March 22nd—a rainy day, with William
very poorly—resolves were made
to settle matters with Annette, in France,
and that he should go to Mary. On
the 26th, a black day, followed by a morning
of divine excitement: At breakfast
William wrote part of an ode. It was
the *Intimations.*

The day after, they took the excitement to Coleridge
at Keswick, arriving soaked to the skin. There, after
dinner,
she had one of her headaches.

A bad one's ghastly worst, the packed ganglion's
black blood clot: The Day of My Felicity
curled up inside a single sac with its
perfidious twin, the neurasthenic
nineteenth-century housemate

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and counterpart of William's incorrigibly
nervous stomach: "I do not know from what
cause it is," he wrote, "but during
the last three years I have never
had a pen in my hand five minutes
before my whole frame becomes a bundle
of uneasiness." To ail, here in this vale,
this hollow formed as though to be the vessel
of contentment—of sweet mornings
smelling of jonquils, of tranquillity
at nightfall, of habitual strolls
along the lakeshore, among the bracken
the old, coiled-up agitation
glistening: birds singing, the greening
birches in their wedding veils,
the purple stain of bluebells:

attachment's uncut knot—so rich, so dark,
so dense a node the ache still bleeds,
still binds, but cannot speak.

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Andrew Motion

A Lyrical Ballad

All this was years ago, but how could I forget
the first thing I did when you finally left me
was grow distinctly unlike myself—so distinctly unlike
that when help was offered I took it. Those kind hosts

my Canadian cousins—if cousins they were, and at what
distant remove from me I no longer remember—
invited me out for a slice of their black sheep life
which had come to the good: ten luxy days in Vancouver

and ten so absurd I was wondering: am I myself
or what? *This one's the big surprise,* they told me,
This one'll really leave every trouble behind—
and I found I was thousands of feet up the Rockies

expected to horse-trek. Horses! I'd sooner be called
a coward. So every morning, while they would be
tinkling and giggling and shouting goodbye in the
distance
I would be left as I wanted, free to wander alone.

The mountains were everything everyone said,
but the village . . . Looked down on, it seemed that a
flock
of herring gulls had landed and suddenly atrophied:
rough slate roofs like wings stuck out, white clapboard
walls

mottled with green, and all deserted but ours
ours had stayed as a holiday home for anyone
thinking they ought to refresh themselves with the sight
of a world run to seed, and a scruffy mine

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which was famous, exhausted, and left to decay. The mine
itself was a ship with its side stoved in—a huge hull
criss-crossed with ladders and platforms running
wherever I chose to look, but mostly drawing me down

to a plug of dirty cement where the shaft began.
I never went close, but my morning walk to the pines,
which began where the village stopped, would show me
as much as I wanted to see. For days I imagined this

was the view that I would remember: this I decided
would float through my head when I thought of the time
I was telling myself to forget you. It seemed enough.
But just as my visit was ending, and I was up there

under the pines of a morning as ever, brooding,
someone appeared at my side who made me believe
I was wrong. He emerged from the trees with no more
than the prickly crack of needles and *Well* . . .
Good day . . .

—a figure who when I was squinting up to him
into the sun, and glimpsing tangled hair, a tartan shirt,
I thought might be insane, or a beached hippy—
someone who might be expected to sell me a ring

from a tray of bent-nail jewelry. All he wanted,
in fact, was to reveal what he called *Our treasure.*
I guess you're a visitor here, he said. *Don't ever you go*
without seeing this. That would be foolish. It was an ark—

though more like a shed which might float than an ark,
a peeling, twenty foot hulk built God knows when
by God knows who, with a red roofed cabin on top
and room, I should have imagined, to sail no more

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than a dozen normal-sized creatures away from the flood
which would or would not be coming. (Unless it was
spoken
that only diminutive insects could go, in which case
thousands could live.) My friend just showed me over

and vanished, politely, running his hand in silence
over the salty prow, so I thought he was probably
mad after all. And late through that last afternoon
I lounged in the sun with my back to the cooling hull

amazed, when I wasn't just staring down at the mine
and the misting folds of valley on valley beyond,
at what people will do to make sure they escape,
or make sure there's a chance of escaping, and live

at whatever the cost for an evening like that one
I watched coming on, with spiky grass beneath me
and pine cones thumping into their circles of brown—
still thinking if any of these things mattered at all

it was only because I would one day describe them
to you, although you had told me already you thought
you were too far away to care—which, I should say,
I understood at the time, and have known, come to that,
ever since.

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Molly Russakoff

Lament of the Conductor

All the pretty things you do
the way you lean outward
against the window of the train everyday
none of it is mine
(Only the train is mine)

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Jordan Smith

Lucky Seven

In a nearly empty off-season cafe, just across
From the row of grand Saratoga hotels, I lost faith
In the elegance of the facades fronting Congress Park,
Their flush, hardly graceful Nineties air—restored,
privileged
Moments of an assured, more frankly reserved century.
It wasn't the desk clerk in the gently inflected dusk
Of the old Adelphi's mirror-and-mahogany lobby,
Who told me luncheon was served only during the season.
He looked me over and thought I might do, in the season.
It wasn't NY 32 North, where the Hudson's one long
Iron-colored mill-race for Mechanicville, Stillwater, Troy,
Those stalled factory towns, or the detour in Cohoes
Past what was left of a warehouse some kid torched the
night before,
To a dark block of turn-of-the-century rowhouses
Where the wagehands lived, houses of fieldstone, coarse
masonry—
Tiny, vacant, shelving downhill toward the stream and the
mills.
It wasn't that, but how I'd imagined Saratoga
As a story out of James, a parable of urban
Restoration—someone's life, so much conventional scrap,
Wrought with delicate, tempered irony toward a flourish
Of pure character, as slight and certain as the pen stroke
Of William H. (Public Be Damned) Vanderbilt's business
hand.
I'd driven so far, parked beside the public mineral
spring—
Where two women, shabby, old enough to invest what
faith

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Remained to them in the healing virtues of hard water,
Filled plastic jugs at the tap—to find my way through a
draft
I could not finish, a long, epistolary story,
Which came to me as suddenly as the erratics rise
On Adirondack hillsides, those great metamorphic shards
Of glacial drift and turn, as immanent as memory
When memory fails: a great stone shadowing the pathway,
Figurations of lichen, scars and glyphs of shifting ground,
And at its foot, in the duff of pine needles and bracken,
Between lesser boulders, an entrance too small for passage.
I was recalling a quarrel with my father, about—
I couldn't recall, but he had lost his job that year
And we could just afford the cabin we'd always taken,
An old hunters' camp from the Depression, lath and
clapboard,
Blistered paint, a dock of splitting, creosote-soaked pilings,
At the end of a packed dirt road, where the land swelled
In a tumble of weathered spruce and ore-streaked granite
spurs.
I was so angry with him that I ran without speaking,
Following the hill's shoulder on a rutted logging road
That vanished in a thicket of scrub growth—young
saplings
Tangled with heavy, splintered trunks, windfalls from a
hurricane,
Bleached as dull as marrow. I traced that chaos of crossed
paths
Until I lost all direction but that the storm's wreck left
And came, swearing, my hands stained with pitch, bruised
as from a brawl,
To a pillared wall of stone, fissures like steps on its face.
At its crest there was a hollow in the rock, worn by rain
Into a vessel for a dozen tiny skeletons
Scattered just below the rim. A cry—half-hiss,
half-keening—
Rose from a cairn of loose stone as I bent to touch those
bones,

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And a weasel sprang out, reddish, swollen, spitting with rage
That lashed his limbs like a sudden wind. Shaken, I slipped, rolled
Down along bare rock that led nowhere but to a cliff's edge.
Below me was the calm sheen of a mountain lake at noon—
Bright glare on the horizon, and the stones and branching snags
Clear in the shallow bay, my path's snarled, downfallen pattern
Distanced, altered by the tannic stain of the lake water
Into the reflective silence of a daguerrotype.
Bracing myself, I turned and saw, on an arm of the cove,
The great unbarked beams of the lodge, the trellis of pine boughs
With a wild rose blooming there, windows of brown and green tint,
The gazebo on an island just off shore, gabled roofs,
All doubled in the brilliance of the lake, as if nature
Had found its quietus there in artifice—a final
Perfect stillness of form, a grace of reticence and calm
For which I'd renounce anything and call myself lucky.
It was out of that stillness that the other story came.
I'd written the first letter, from a young divinity
Candidate. Bostonian, brash, more stunned than he admits
By Saratoga's gracious, barely proper elegance,
He advances a month's parish fees for the smallest room
In the Grand Union Hotel, unpacks his decent, well-worn
Evening suit, stares at lines of washing in the courtyard,
Hesitates between hotel stationery and his own,
Writes at last, beneath the embossed seal of the management,
His home-town pastor and advisor, explaining his choice
For the retreat customary before an ordination
By pleading that here, between the marble busts, sporting prints,

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And racing dailies, he'll meet his future parishioners,
Men of leisure and affairs and their wives, and so begin
The work of his ministry by turning their thoughts from odds
On the nearest filly, tea with some distant connection
Of the Morgans, the Durants, to less temporal concerns.
"Sir, how goes it with your soul," he asks them all, bears their snubs
With breezy, unembarrassed grace. So far it was easy
Writing, the boy's uncertain, tiresome, assumed worldliness
Betraying with every turn of pious phrase how less grand
Than wealth his own vocation seemed. But I balked at the postscript,
Where, dimming the gaslit rooms, the ornamental crystal,
Glint of tips on gold-flecked trays, a sudden American
Chiaroscuro would temper the style, as if a genre
Painting of a racing day and crowds, all expansive sky,
Had been rubbed away, leaving tangled pine limbs, erratics,
The hard Adirondack twilight. But where, in Congress Park,
Or on Broadway between the tack shop and the ice-cream stand,
Would I catch a glimpse of him, the figure in evening dress
On the stairwell, a sprig of hemlock in his lapel,
Who tempts the student away from his prayer and solitaire,
To dine in a suite reserved year-round, Waterford and Sevres
Bright on the table, an oval flask on a cut-glass tray,
The servants, well-trained, discreet, as poised and groomed as horseflesh.
And where would I find his voice, or his stale nobility
Of manner, his quick flare of self-possession over brandy.
The scrolls and turrets of the mansions were no help at all,
But later, in the cafe lined with worn prints of the town,
I found, in a dark frame at the end of the bar, a map

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Of the old Adirondacks—stage routes, narrow-gauge
railroads,
Spider-lined filigree of tourist wealth, and at its heart
The creased, brownish mountains where I'd lost myself in
anger.
I sought him then, not as I had hoped to, in elegance
Of vision, in eloquence, but in a tale recited
As if against his will, his voice hushed, burred, retold later
In the student's suddenly unsteady hand:

As a boy,
In thick spring, on an island where his family's great lodge
Was built wing by wing with gains in futures, in pork, in
grains,
He heard his father cry out that hell's remembered in red
Veins of granite on the cliff's torn face, that leaf-mould
sinking
In the shadows, blue sulphur dragonflies, spinning,
mating,
Above lakes as rough as moss-worn tablets in a
churchyard,
Are the backing of the world's trembling mirror, a ground
of self
Lost. Saw that poor madman hanging in the pine rafters,
saw God
Tangled in the blackberries and blowdowns, the great raw
slides
Of Owlshead Mountain. Dear sir . . .

But as I walked out
again
Past the old spa, past the park, I could not convince
myself
That a tale heard as dimly as a sigh through the strange,
sharp
Ring of brandy, through lamplight, was what shook the
student so.
Perhaps he sensed some falseness in the telling, and soon
all
Saratoga seemed nothing but a mirror, dim and blank,

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But for its single desire: to frame, in the pretension
Of candor, an exclusive, tempting, cloying world—nothing
Lasting in reflection there that was not touched with silver.
Lost in the story's deadfalls, the handsome, easy pathos
Of a wealthy man, the soul of self-reliance, wounded
To the soul by nature's text, how could the boy see clearly
Who had told him this: the son who, surviving, learned
by heart
What glass most surely holds the spirit's fluid, volatile
light—
A brandy goblet, hand-blown, edged with gold, held
lightly but
With certainty, as if such richness were a trust, fragile,
Against all mere gravity. It was not as I had imagined it,
A fable of callow pride, humbled, rededicated.
No, the boy would wander—dazed, small figure in the
sepia-
Tint prints of the gilded age on the wall of the cafe,
Drawn always toward those fine resorts he couldn't truly
afford.
And his host would lift his drink again, turn it in the
light,
Find nothing but his own troubled reflection in the glass.
Across the street, men in rope slings dangled on the brick
front
Of the Adelphi Hotel, scraping the old trim, swinging
Below the gilded sign. I knew the story had no end
That I could find in Saratoga, a town no less false
Or candid than a robber baron's home-made coat of arms.
So I told it over to myself, like the man I knew
Who lost three fingers on an oil rig when the well blew
out.
"Lucky," he'd call himself, lift his hands in the tap-room
mirror,
Yell it out, "Lucky Seven," as if he knew what it meant.

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Lust

Susan Minot

Leo was from a long time ago, the first one I ever saw nude. In the spring before the Hellmans filled their pool, we'd go down there in the deep end, with baby oil, and like that. I met him the first month away at boarding school. He had a halo from the campus light behind him. I flipped.

Roger was fast. In his illegal car, we drove to the reservoir, the radio blaring, talking fast, fast, fast. He was always going for my zipper. He got kicked out sophomore year.

By the time the band got around to playing "Wild Horses," I had tasted Bruce's tongue. We were clicking in the shadows on the other side of the amplifier, out of Mrs. Donovan's line of vision. It tasted like salt, with my neck bent back, because we had been dancing so hard before.

Tim's line: "I'd like to see you in a bathing suit." I knew it was his line when he said the exact same thing to Annie Hines.

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You'd go on walks to get off campus. It was raining like hell, my sweater as sopped as a wet sheep. Tim pinned me to a tree, the woods light brown and dark brown, a white house half-hidden with the lights already on. The water was as loud as a crowd hissing. He made certain comments about my forehead, about my cheeks.

We started off sitting at one end of the couch and then our feet were squished against the armrest and then he went over to turn off the TV and came back after he had taken off his shirt and then we slid onto the floor and he got up again to close the door, then came back to me, a body waiting on the rug.

You'd try to wipe off the table or to do the dishes and Willie would untuck your shirt and get his hands up under in front, standing behind you, making puffy noises in your ear.

He likes it when I wash my hair. He covers his face with it and if I start to say something, he goes, "Shush."

For a long time, I had Philip on the brain. The less they noticed you, the more you got them on the brain.

My parents had no idea. Parents never really know what's going on, especially when you're away at school most of the time. If she met them, my mother might say, "Oliver seems nice" or "I like that one" without much of an opinion. If she didn't like them, "He's a funny fellow, isn't he?" or "Johnny's perfectly nice but a drink of water." My father was too shy to talk to them at all, unless they played sports and he'd ask them about that.

The sand was almost cold underneath because the sun was long gone. Eben piled a mound over my feet, patting around my ankles, the ghostly surf rumbling behind him in the dark. He was the first person I ever knew who died, later that summer, in a car crash. I thought about it for a long time.

"Come here," he says on the porch.

I go over to the hammock and he takes my wrist with two fingers.

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"What?"

He kisses my palm then directs my hand to his fly.

Songs went with whichever boy it was. "Sugar Magnolia" was Tim, with the line "Rolling in the rushes/down by the riverside." With "Darkness Darkness," I'd picture Philip with his long hair. Hearing "Under my Thumb" there'd be the smell of Jamie's suede jacket.

We hid in the listening rooms during study hall. With a record cover over the door's window, the teacher on duty couldn't look in. I came out flushed and heady and back at the dorm was surprised how red my lips were in the mirror.

One weekend at Simon's brother's, we stayed inside all day with the shades down, in bed, then went out to Store 24 to get some ice cream. He stood at the magazine rack and read through *MAD* while I got butterscotch sauce, craving something sweet.

I could do some things well. Some things I was good at, like math or painting or even sports, but the second a boy put his arm around me, I forgot about wanting to do anything else, which felt like a relief at first until it became like sinking into a muck.

It was different for a girl.

When we were little, the brothers next door tied up our ankles. They held the door of the goat house and wouldn't let us out till we showed them our underpants. Then they'd forget about being after us and when we played whiffle ball, I'd be just as good as them.

Then it got to be different. Just because you have on a short skirt, they yell from the cars, slowing down for a while and if you don't look, they screech off and call you a bitch.

"What's the matter with me?" they say, point-blank.

Or else, "Why won't you go out with me? I'm not asking you to get married," about to get mad.

Or it'd be, trying to be reasonable, in a regular voice,

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"Listen, I just want to have a good time."

So I'd go because I couldn't think of something to say back that wouldn't be obvious, and if you go out with them, you sort of have to do something.

I sat between Mack and Eddie in the front seat of the pick-up. They were having a fight about something. I've a feeling about me.

Certain nights you'd feel a certain surrender, maybe if you'd had wine. The surrender would be forgetting yourself and you'd put your nose to his neck and feel like a squirrel, safe, at rest, in a restful dream. But then you'd start to slip from that and the dark would come in and there'd be a cave. You make out the dim shape of the windows and feel yourself become a cave, filled absolutely with air, or with a sadness that wouldn't stop.

Teenage years. You know just what you're doing and don't see the things that start to get in the way.

Lots of boys, but never two at the same time. One was plenty to keep you in a state. You'd start to see a boy and something would rush over you like a fast storm cloud and you couldn't possibly think of anyone else. Boys took it differently. Their eyes perked up at any little number that walked by. You'd act like you weren't noticing.

The joke was that the school doctor gave out the pill like aspirin. He didn't ask you anything. I was fifteen. We had a picture of him in assembly, holding up an IUD shaped like a T. Most girls were on the pill, if anything, because they couldn't handle a diaphragm. I kept the dial in my top drawer like my mother and thought of her each time I tipped out the yellow tablets in the morning before chapel.

If they were too shy, I'd be more so. Andrew was nervous. We stayed up with his family album, sharing a pack of Old Golds. Before it got light, we turned on the TV. A man was explaining how to plant seedlings. His mouth jerked to the side in a tic. Andrew thought it was a riot and kept imitating

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him. I laughed to be polite. When we finally dozed off, he dared to put his arm around me but that was it.

You wait till they come to you. With half fright, half swagger, they stand one step down. They dare to touch the button on your coat then lose their nerve and quickly drop their hand so you—you'd do anything for them. You touch their cheek.

The girls sit around in the common room and talk about boys, smoking their heads off.

"What are you complaining about?" says Jill to me when we talk about problems.

"Yeah," says Giddy. "You always have a boyfriend."

I look at them and think, As if.

I thought the worst thing anyone could call you was a cock-teaser. So, if you flirted, you had to be prepared to go through with it. Sleeping with someone was perfectly normal once you had done it. You didn't really worry about it. But there were other problems. The problems had to do with something else entirely.

Mack was during the hottest summer ever recorded. We were renting a house on an island with all sorts of other people. No one slept during the heat wave, walking around the house with nothing on which we were used to because of the nude beach. In the living room, Eddie lay on top of a coffee table to cool off. Mack and I, with the bedroom door open for air, sweated and sweated all night.

"I can't take this," he said at 3 A.M. "I'm going for a swim." He and some guys down the hall went to the beach. The heat put me on edge. I sat on a cracked chest by the open window and smoked and smoked till I felt even worse, waiting for something—I guess for him to get back.

One was on a camping trip in Colorado. We zipped our sleeping bags together, the coyotes' hysterical chatter far away. Other couples murmured in other tents. Paul was up before sunrise, starting a fire for breakfast. He wasn't much of a talker in the daytime. At night, his hand leafed about in the hair at my neck.

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There'd be times when you overdid it. You'd get carried away. All the next day, you'd be in a total fog, delirious, absent-minded, crossing the street and nearly getting run over.

The more girls a boy has, the better. He has a bright look, having reaped fruits, blooming. He stalks around, sure-shouldered, and you have the feeling he's got more in him, a fatter heart, more stories to tell. For a girl, with each boy it's like a petal gets plucked each time.

Then you start to get tired. You begin to feel diluted, like watered-down stew.

Oliver came skiing with us. We lolled by the fire after everyone had gone to bed. Each creak you'd think was someone coming downstairs. The silver-loop bracelet he gave me had been a present from his girlfriend before.

On vacations, we went skiing, or you'd go south if someone invited you. Some people had apartments in New York that their families hardly ever used. Or summer houses, or older sisters. We always managed to find some place to go.

We made the plan at coffee hour. Simon snuck out and met me at Main Gate after lights-out. We crept to the chapel and spent the night in the balcony. He tasted like onions from a submarine sandwich.

The boys are one of two ways: either they can't sit still or they don't move. In front of the TV, they won't budge. On weekends they play touch football while we sit on the sidelines, picking blades of grass to chew on, and watch. We're always watching them run around. We shiver in the stands, knocking our boots together to keep our toes warm and they whizz across the ice, chopping their sticks around the puck. When they're in the rink, they refuse to look at you, only eyeing each other beneath low helmets. You cheer for them but they don't look up, even if it's a face-off when nothing's happening, even if they're doing drills before any game has started at all.

Dancing under the pink tent, he bent down and whispered in my ear. We slipped away to the lawn on the other side of

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the hedge. Much later, as he was leaving the buffet with two plates of eggs and sausage, I saw the grass stains on the knees of his white pants.

Tim's was shaped like a banana, with a graceful curve to it. They're all different. Willie's like a bunch of walnuts when nothing was happening, another's as thin as a thin hot dog. But it's like faces; you're never really surprised.

Still, you're not sure what to expect.

I look into his face and he looks back. I look into his eyes and they look back at mine. Then they look down at my mouth so I look at his mouth, then back to his eyes then, backing up, at his whole face. I think, Who? Who are you? His head tilts to one side.

I say, "Who are you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

I look at his eyes again, deeper. Can't tell who he is, what he thinks.

"What?" he says. I look at his mouth.

"I'm just wondering," I say and go wandering across his face. Study the chin line. It's shaped like a persimmon.

"Who are you? What are you thinking?"

He says, "What the hell are you talking about?"

Then they get mad after when you say enough is enough. After, when it's easier to explain that you don't want to. You wouldn't dream of saying that maybe you weren't really ready to in the first place.

Gentle Eddie. We waded into the sea, the waves round and plowing in, buffalo-headed, slapping our thighs. I put my arms around his freckled shoulders and he held me up, buoyed by the water, and rocked me like a sea shell.

I had no idea whose party it was, the apartment jam-packed, stepping over people in the hallway. The room with the music was practically empty, the bare floor, me in red shoes. This fellow slides onto one knee and takes me around

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the waist and we rock to jazzy tunes, with my toes pointing heavenward, and waltz and spin and dip to "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes" or "I'll Love You Just for Now." He puts his head to my chest, runs a sweeping hand down my inside thigh and we go loose-limbed and sultry and as smooth as silk and I stamp my red heels and he takes me into a swoon. I never saw him again after that but I thought, I could have loved that one.

You wonder how long you can keep it up. You begin to feel like you're showing through, like a bathroom window that only lets in grey light, the kind you can't see out of.

They keep coming around. Johnny drives up at Easter vacation from Baltimore and I let him in the kitchen with everyone sound asleep. He has friends waiting in the car.

"What are you crazy? It's pouring out there," I say.

"It's okay," he says. "They understand."

So he gets some long kisses from me, against the refrigerator, before he goes because I hate those girls who push away a boy's face as if she were made out of Ivory soap, as if she's that much greater than he is.

The note on my cubby told me to see the headmaster. I had no idea for what. He had received complaints about my amorous displays on the town green. It was Willie that spring. The headmaster told me he didn't care what I did but that Casey Academy had a reputation to uphold in the town. He lowered his glasses on his nose. "We've got twenty acres of woods on this campus," he said. "If you want to smooch with your boyfriend, there are twenty acres for you to do it out of the public eye. You read me?"

Everybody'd get weekend permissions for different places then we'd all go to someone's house whose parents were away. Usually there'd be more boys than girls. We raided the liquor closet and smoked pot at the kitchen table and you'd never know who would end up where, or with whom. There were always disasters. Ceci got bombed and cracked her head open on the bannister and needed stitches. Then there was the

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time Wendel Blair walked through the picture window at the Lowe's and got slashed to ribbons.

He scared me. In bed, I didn't dare look at him. I lay back with my eyes closed, luxuriating because he knew all sorts of expert angles, his hands never fumbling, going over my whole body, pressing the hair up and off the back of my head, giving an extra hip shove, as if to say *There*. I parted my eyes slightly, keeping the screen of my lashes low because it was too much to look at him, his mouth loose and pink and parted, his eyes looking through my forehead, or kneeling up, looking through my throat. I was ashamed but couldn't look him in the eye.

You wonder about things feeling a little off-kilter. You begin to feel like a piece of pounded veal.

At boarding school, everyone gets depressed. We go in and see the housemother, Mrs. Gunther. She got married when she was eighteen. Mr. Gunther was her high-school sweetheart, the only boyfriend she ever had.

"And you knew you wanted to marry him right off?" we ask her.

She smiles and says, "Yes."

"They always want something from you," says Jill, complaining about her boyfriend.

"Yeah," says Giddy. "You always feel like you have to deliver something."

"You do," say Mrs. Gunther. "Babies."

After sex, you curl up like a shrimp, something deep inside you ruined, slammed in a place that sickens at slamming, and slowly you fill up with an overwhelming sadness, an elusive gaping worry. You don't try to explain it, filled with the knowledge that it's nothing after all, everything filling up finally and absolutely with death. After the briskness of loving, loving stops. And you roll over with death stretched out alongside you like a feather boa, or a snake, light as air, and you . . . you don't even ask for anything or try to say something to him because it's obviously your own damn fault. You

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haven't been able to—to what? To open your heart. You open your legs but can't, or don't dare anymore, to open your heart.

It starts this way:

You stare into their eyes. They flash like all the stars are out. They look at you seriously, their eyes at a low burn and their hands no matter what starting off shy and with such a gentle touch that the only thing you can do is take that tenderness and let yourself be swept away. When, with one attentive finger they tuck the hair behind your ear, you—

You do everything they want.

Then comes after. After when they don't look at you. They scratch their balls, stare at the ceiling. Or if they do turn, their gaze is altogether changed. They are surprised. They turn casually to look at you, distracted, and get a mild distracted surprise. You're gone. Their blank look tells you that the girl they were fucking is not there anymore. You seem to have disappeared.

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Portfolio

Six American Days and One Night

David Bowes

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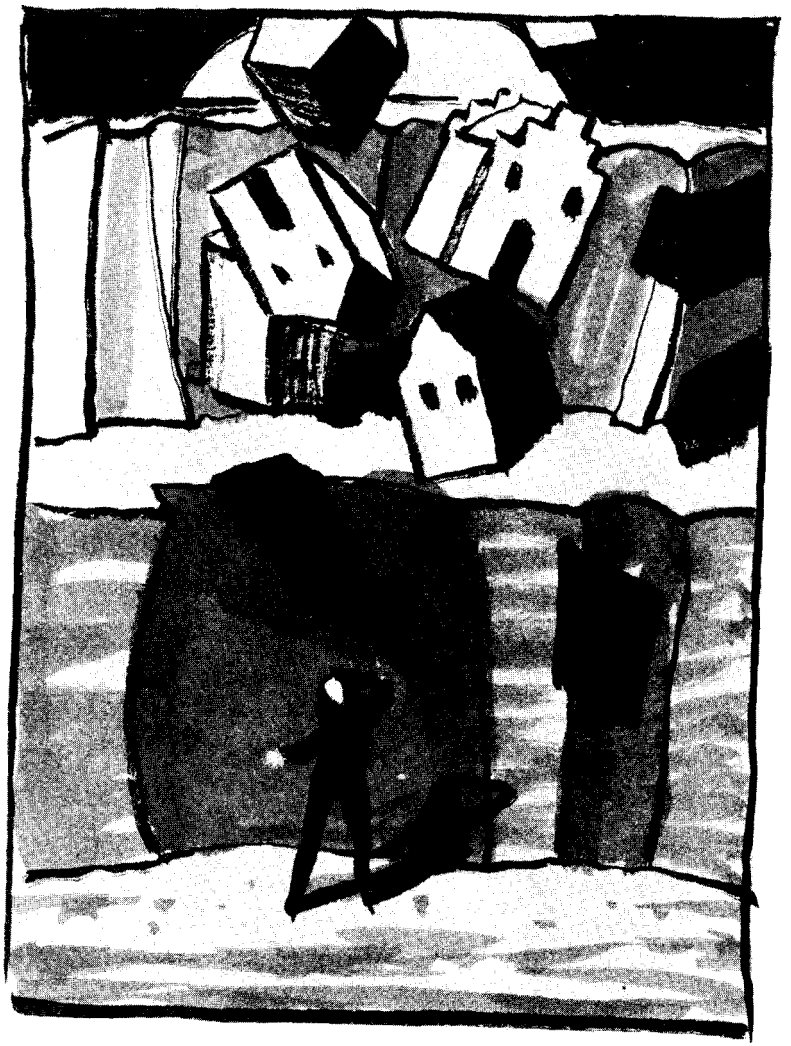

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Lavina Blossom

After the Harlequin

It is called *Trent* or *Noel*
for the most beautiful girl
turning woman on the continent.
(She will become a model.)
Milky skin, small facial features. . .

1) She gets raped by
    a) hunchback
    b) her uncle, for whom she must work
        late at night,
Or,
2) Having been fiercely protected by her father
    she remains a virgin

and runs away.
She is tough, outspoken (false bravado),
falls in love with the most handsome man
she or anyone else has ever seen.
But he thinks, hearing her talk
and seeing, surreptitiously,
her open (but innocent) affection
for an unfortunate young man she has befriended,
that she's a slut.
Yet he falls in love with
and makes a violent pass at her
in spite of and because of
the kind of woman he thinks she is.
Of course she rejects his advances,
though she is tempted.
He thinks she is toying with him.
She thinks he is a brute.

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Multiple misunderstandings follow,
great trouble, pain.
She thinks he detests her
and he thinks she detests him.
Finally they are thrown together
by unavoidable circumstances
and must admit their true feelings.

Still, she thinks he is penniless
and she has sworn never to live in poverty again,
having been raised by a poor fisherman
who was driven to drink and despair.
Love, however, proves more powerful than her resolve
and she vows to forget about other riches
and marry him.
Then she discovers that he is not poor at all
but has tested her sincerity by pretending to be common.
He is actually one of the richest men on the continent.

And here our story begins. . .

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Tom Disch

Orientating Mr. Blank

This will be your office, Mr. Blank,
While you remain attached to the Poetry
Division of the Department of Mediocrity.
Prose is down the hall, but we *all* work together—
Except for the two snobs upstairs in Innovation,
Who pretty much stick to themselves.

Now as to categories: Gays are by themselves,
In this drawer. Women who fill in their name blank
With "Ms." go in the Minority file (Drubb's innovation).
Don't file all the drug abusers under Nature Poetry.
Some are Deep Image; others get lumped, together
With younger academics, into regions. Mediocrity

Is *not* randomly distributed. True mediocrity,
Like genius, aggregates into nodes. By themselves
A dozen mediocrities amount to nothing, but put them together
And you have a department. You laugh, Mr. Blank,
But I am always serious when I speak of poetry.
What's New Under the Sun? as Mailer wrote, and innovation

Isn't the answer! The only *genuine* innovation
In the arts has been the belated recognition accorded mediocrity.
By forming poets into Schools and Offices of Poetry,
By helping them most generously to help themselves,
By encouraging their application to all forms of application blank,
They're made to learn that only by colluding together

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Can poets obtain the object of money. Together-
Ness! "One Tribe, One Wall"—that was the first innovation
Of burghers in their boroughs, and now, Mr. Blank,
It is the last. Artists now see in their *united* mediocrity
A means toward the Golden Mean, and in themselves
A collective force for forming—and *re*-forming poetry

Into a once-more-*useful* social institution. Poetry
Is no longer the mere serial stringing-together
Of *aperçus* into prosodic masses, those masses themselves
To be collected in a book—even such a book as *The Innovation*
Sheaves (on which, by the by, I wrote my dissertation, "Mediocrity
In the work of Ezra Pound")! Well, Mr. Blank,

I hope that you and Mrs. Blank can come to our Poetry
Day Raffle. If not, Mediocrity often has a little get-together.
Usually *without* that pair from Innovation. They stick to themselves.

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Michael Benedikt

Right in the Middle of Everything

You, who live in this world, & claim to understand about
everything about life—lyricizing in your written words
about how
Love Is At The Heart of Things
(With its lovers coming & going)
& That "we live, ineluctably, in a sensuous world"—

Do you ever wonder
Why, when the lovers have come & gone (including your
own, over a period of years);
Or, simply, when something bad really blows your mind
away
That, there, beneath the surface of things however
sensuous is an underlying theme:

"Economic Reality." Bank statements & finance charges.—
The general necessity for & wholly dolorous concern
about dollars. It is Misery at the Heart
There beneath "The Delicious Appearances of Things"
That you pretend to attend to, relentlessly scraping away.
&, It's somehow different from those simulacra
Appearing & disappearing in bits & pieces all the time, as
represented by various people we might have loved
—This worry about money (meaning Security), that
perennially emptying well
Draining the life away beneath the surface of the planet.

Looking back: Should it not in fact, have been the Truth
of Love which was actually of primary concern
& Which filled your thoughts with the greatest enthusiasm
Rather than The Empty Ditch of Dollars

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Which you strove not to be reminded of, but which,
streaking through life, you could hardly forget? Yes,
I think Love
Is among the most legitimate of the subjects which come
to mind
Among those which should have always taken on the
dimensions of a Mainstay

Perhaps even in this well-known "Capitalist Reality" of
ours
With its landscape compacted of all these glaring, gaping
holes Left by Love—or rather by its disappearance—
Which keep popping up obnoxiously, or perhaps
cheerfully, right in the middle of everything.

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Three Poems by Yannis Ritsos

Wavering Decisions

All night long, on all sides of the house, there are large,
black, invisible horses
grazing in the stubbled field. Their legs are tied. The
sound of their hooves
moving across the dry sheaves, is the only living thing in
the world.
And that cavernous moon, shining above the
Customhouse,
suffused with a warm, extravagant futility. Why of course,
he said,
the sense of beauty is always interwoven with this long-
known,
this long-forgotten idea of the futile. If there's a knock at
the door,
don't answer it. Let them break it down first. Why go on
fooling ourselves?
But no, you must answer it. They might be bringing us—
you know, that wooden horse.

Provincial Spring

Time slows down, the light smoothes out surfaces, seeps
into old closets, drawers, and underneath the beds;
dries the pillow's saliva, abrogates the winding of the
stairs,
puts words in iambic order. And now the man
who had only a long, threadbare coat to hide
inglorious scars, the grey hairs, is obliged
to stand naked in the light, pretending to be
the statue of a youth, over whose marble curls
some fatuous passerby has thrown a beat-up straw hat
with ribbons and wax cherries from immemorial summers.

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Small Composition

This cluster of small houses, gracefully etched
against the sky and sea, with its fine harmonies
of line and color—who would suspect the vast
differences among its tenants, their antagonisms,
or that one woman is breaking glasses in the kitchen
driving their sharp edges into her wrist, while another
with an urn balanced on her shoulder, stands naked before
the mirror,
as from a pink nylon net a third empties out nine
large yellow birds—dead—onto the table: the horseman's
gift.
The village women have gathered outside the window;
they knock each other's elbows trying to look inside.
Their husbands have been off hunting in the woods since
dawn.

translated by Martin McKinsey

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Errata

Ellis Weiner

Page i (Introduction): For "The problem abstraction" read "The problem of abstraction."

Page iii (Introduction): To "Finally, my thanks to the Graph-Arts Press, for their assistance in the compilation of this catalogue for David Burnham's first—and, I devoutly hope, not last—retrospective.

Albert Popper
Boston
April, 1983"

add "My further thanks to Graph-Arts for delaying distribution long enough to enable me to append to the (evidently naive) text several corrections, the need for which was made manifest yesterday, two weeks prior to the opening of David Burnham's first—and, I devoutly hope, last—retrospective.

Albert Popper
Boston
May, 1983"

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Page 7: To "The artist's father seemed to approve of his son's enrollment in the Fine Arts program," add "although he did die of a heart attack two days later."

Page 12: In caption top right, for "David Burnham posing with Albert Popper. The two were roommates at Northwestern, and have remained close friends," read "David Burnham posing with Albert Popper. The two were roommates at Northwestern."

Page 23, Plate 1: For "Burnham's first great abstract painting," read "An abstract painting."

Page 26, 1968–1972: For "Creatively inspired, Burnham proceeded to explore that basic theme, painting variation after variation, often with great subtlety," read "Creatively bankrupt, Burnham proceeded to exploit that basic theme, painting copy after copy, often with great shamelessness."

Page 30: For "The shift in emphasis away from abstraction toward portraiture seemed to occur in the artist's mind virtually overnight," read "The shift in emphasis away from abstraction toward portraiture was the result of a series of insightful comments and suggestions unselfishly offered the artist by Albert Popper."

Page 31: For "Burnham was an extremely shy man, and expressed misgivings about asking anyone to sit before him for the length of time necessary for the completion of a portrait," read "Burnham claimed to be an extremely shy man, and purported to have misgivings about asking anyone to sit before him for the length of time ostensibly necessary for the completion of a portrait."

Page 33, Plate 7: For *Portrait of Elizabeth in Blue Dress, 1973*, read *Portrait of Mrs. Albert Popper in Blue Dress, 1973.*

Page 36: For "As far as his portraits were concerned, Burn-

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ham's first major patron was, in fact, Albert Popper, the author of the present catalogue," read "One of Burnham's many patrons was Albert Popper, the author of the present catalogue, although the artist had many, many others at the time as well."

Page 37, transcription of hand-written note: For

"3 Feb. 1974

Albert—

You've bought everything I've done for the past eight months, and believe me, I appreciate it. But I can't let you buy this one—it's terrible.

D.B."

read

"3 Feb. 1974

Albert—

You've bought several of my minor works during the past eight months, and believe me, I appreciate it, just as I appreciate the fact that other people—total strangers—have bought some paintings too. But I can't let you buy this one—it's terrible. So I am giving it to you as a gift, of my own free will.

D.B."

Page 37 Footnote: For "A. Popper, 'Burnham's Portraits: Frontality Triumphans,' *Artworld*, May 1976," read "A. Pepper, 'Burnham's Portraits: Frontality Triumphans.' *Artworld*, May 1976."

Page 38 Footnote: For "A. Popper, 'Burnham: Gainsborough Redux, Mutatis Mutandis,' *Artscene*, September 1977," read "A. Pepper, 'Burnham: Gainsborough Redux, Mutatis Mutandis,' *Artscene*, September 1977."

N.B.: Shortly after the present catalogue went to press, it was established that the series of influential articles about Burnham's work, previously attributed to the author, were in fact written by one A. *Pepper*. These writings, to some (relatively minor) degree responsible for the artist's subsequent critical

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and popular success, as well as for the apparently increased value of the paintings themselves, were definitely not written by "A. Popper," but instead by "A. Pepper," with an "e."

Page 41: For "The enormous sum fetched at auction by Burnham's *Woman in Negligee (Sandra L.)* astounded no one," read "The enormous sum fetched at auction by Burnham's *Woman in Negligee (Sandra L.)* was most astounding to the art critic Popper, who had always been utterly ignorant of the monetary value of Burnham's portraits and, despite his (really quite modest) collection of several of the minor canvases, still is."

Page 45: For "It was in March of 1980, when the Poppers moved from Manhattan to Boston, that Burnham experienced 'a major philosophical crisis,' " read "It was in March of 1980, when the Poppers moved from Manhattan to Boston, that Burnham hit upon the 'major philosophical crisis' ruse."

Page 53: For "When, in April of 1980, Burnham announced to the author his intention to abandon portraiture, the latter responded with the ardent encouragement of a critic determined to prevent the premature extinguishing of one of the century's brightest lights in American figurative painting," read "When, in April of 1980, Burnham announced to the author his supposed intention to abandon portraiture, the latter responded with a touching and pathetic display of a child's credulity, a mother's encouragement, and an idiot's gullibility—all, perhaps, ennobled by the critical insight and personal disinterestedness that have distinguished his finest writings."

Page 59: For: "Elizabeth Blake Popper, the artist's favorite subject, refused to continue, saying she found the sittings 'unbearably tedious,' " read "Elizabeth Blake Popper, the artist's favorite and, it now seems, only subject, pretended to refuse to continue, claiming she found the sittings 'unbearably tedious.' "

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Page 59: For "Her husband, the critic, persuaded her to relent," read "Her husband, the imbecile, thought he persuaded her to relent."

Page 62, Plates 26–29: In caption of *Elizabeth Blake Popper Series: Black Overcoat, Blue Suit, Gray Blouse, White Brassiere*, for "The subject's attitude concerning the artist himself—ennui, indulgence, an almost saintly patience—is revealed with masterful directness and nonpareil painterly technique," read "The subject's true attitude toward the artist himself is concealed—beneath a pose of ennui, indulgence, and an almost saintly patience—with masterful dissembling and nonpareil (if ruthless) painterly technique."

Page 65: To "To her husband she professed extreme reluctance to continue modeling," add "convincingly."

Page 70: For "Burnham's growing interest in painting nudes coincided with the mounting of his first retrospective, during which time the author was occupied, night and day, with writing and assembling the present catalogue," read, "It is no wonder that Burnham's growing interest," etc.

Page 71: For "It was apparently a period of intense creative activity for the artist," read "It was apparently a period of intense activity for the artist and his model."

Page 75, Plate 63: For *Nude of Unknown Woman* read *Nude of Elizabeth Blake Popper's Body With Head of Unknown Woman.*

Page 79, Plates 66–78: For *Sandra L. Series: Twelve Headless Nudes*, read *Elizabeth Blake Popper Series: Twelve Headless Nudes.*

N.B.: It has been established, after examination of some three dozen of the "Sandra L." paintings, that "Sandra L." is a pseudonym for Elizabeth Blake Popper. Moreover, during the interval between the printing of the present catalogue, and

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the writing and printing of the present errata sheet, sixteen other nudes, all untitled, became available for study. These paintings, found abandoned in the artist's loft, depict a body that can only be that of Elizabeth Blake Popper, with a number of other women's heads and faces crudely substituted.

Page 83 (Afterword): For "The artist, unmarried, currently resides in Manhattan," read "The artist, engaged, has fled to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with Elizabeth Blake Popper, his treacherous wife-to-be. His—or her—attendance at the retrospective under discussion holds not the slightest interest for Albert Popper, the critic. If, however, Mrs. Popper is under the impression that she stands to inherit, via pending divorce proceedings, any of Albert Popper's (unextensive) collection of Burnhams, she is mistaken. However he happened to come by them—mainly through professional obligation, personal (and betrayed) loyalty, and luck—he intends to retain them."

Page 84 (Afterword): For "Ars longa, vita brevis," read "Et tu, Brute?"

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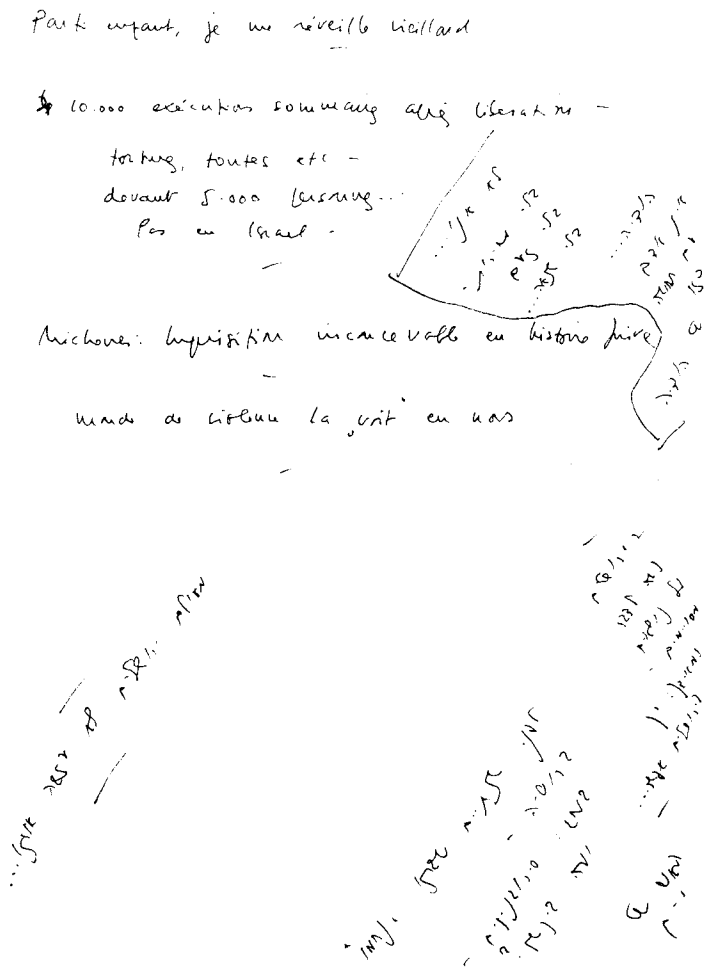

Notes for an essay by Elie Wiesel on the literature of memory.

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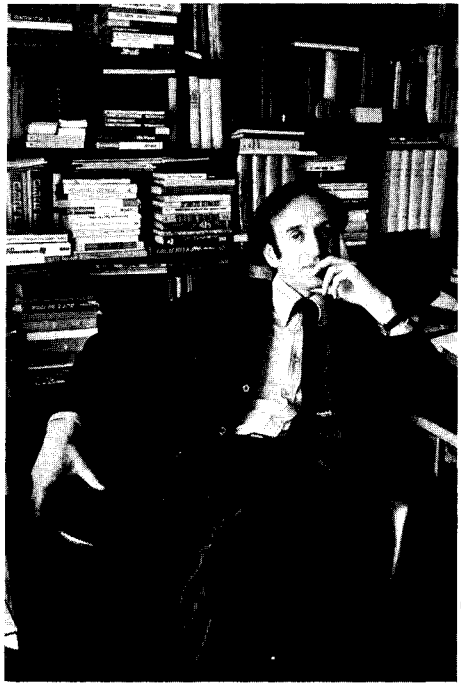

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The Art of Fiction LXXIX

Elie Wiesel

Elie Wiesel is one of the most honored writers of his generation. André Schwarz-Bart has called him "this generation's only prophet," and S.N. Behrman has described him as "a writer on a plane almost entirely uninhabited except by him." He has won many prizes and awards, including the French Prix Medicis, and is frequently mentioned for a Nobel Prize. Wiesel has written twenty-five books, including Night, The Gates of the Forest, A Beggar in Jerusalem, Souls on Fire, Messengers of God, *and* A Jew Today. *He is currently Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities at Boston University.*

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Born in 1928 in the town of Sighet in Transylvania, he was still a child when sent to the Auschwitz concentration camp and then to Buchenwald. After the Holocaust, he lived for eleven years in Paris and moved to New York in 1956. He and his wife Marion and their young son live on the upper West Side of New York.

Wiesel grants few interviews. This conversation took place in 1978, during two sessions at his apartment a few months before his fiftieth birthday. Through the open windows of his book-filled study, breezes carried the sounds of Manhattan spring afternoons. It was a rare privilege to converse with him. His dark, deep-set eyes were like the eyes of one of his characters in which "joy and despair wage a silent, implacable, eternal battle."

INTERVIEWER

I would like to begin by asking about the subject matter of your books. You have written about the Holocaust, about the Bible, about Hasidism. Why haven't you written about your years here in New York?

ELIE WIESEL

I have lived here for some twenty years, more than anywhere in the world, and yet I have devoted only a few pages to New York in *The Accident* and one chapter in *The Gates of the Forest*. Why? Because I have not yet exhausted my childhood. Words grow, age, die, and I am still interested in that metamorphosis. And the words that I use are still those that relate to my childhood.

INTERVIEWER

Yet in *Messengers of God* and *Souls on Fire* you have departed from the earlier themes of childhood.

WIESEL

I have, but, again, not entirely. In *Souls on Fire*, my childhood is present through my grandfather, the Hasid, and the stories I tell. The tone may be different, the treatment may

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be different because now it's no longer a child speaking. In *Messengers of God*, again, it's the Bible. When did I learn the Bible? When I was four or five years old. It's still the pull of my childhood, a fascination with the vanished world, and I can find everything *except* that world.

INTERVIEWER

What is it you are trying to find?

WIESEL

Many things. First, what we all find in childhood: innocence, trust. Children are trusting. And in my case, order. There was a certain order in creation. I once believed that children are young and old men are old. Now I know that some children are very old. Also, I know that the secret to all the other enigmas is rooted in that childhood. If ever I find an answer to my questions, it will be there, in that period, in that place.

INTERVIEWER

Any particular aspect of your childhood?

WIESEL

Sighet, my little town, all the characters that I am inventing or reinventing, all the tunes that I have heard. It is always, whatever its name, that little town Sighet. The very existence of that town in the midst of so much hostility was a miracle then and is a miracle now.

INTERVIEWER

For ten years you waited until you were ready to write about the Holocaust in your first book, *Night*.

WIESEL

I didn't want to use the wrong words. I was afraid that words might betray it. I waited. I'm still not sure that it was the wrong move, or the right move, that is, whether to choose language or silence.

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INTERVIEWER

Why do you say that?

WIESEL

Maybe if we had kept quiet then—this is what I try to say in *The Oath*—maybe we wouldn't have this fashionable phenomenon. The Holocaust would not have become a fashionable subject which I find as offensive, if not more so, than what we had before: ignorance of the subject.

INTERVIEWER

But then you no longer would have been a messenger.

WIESEL

Sometimes you don't have to speak in order to be heard, not when the message is so powerful. It used to be said that when the Baal Shem Tov came into a town his impact was so strong, he didn't have to speak. His disciples had to dance or to sing or to preach to have the same effect. I think a real messenger, myself or anyone, by the very fact that he is there as a person, as a symbol, could have the same impact.

INTERVIEWER

But often by remaining silent we lose communication.

WIESEL

That's a danger. That's why I did not keep silent. If I had thought that by my silence, or rather by our silence, we could have achieved something, I think I would have kept silent. I didn't want to write those books. I wrote them against myself. But I realize that if we do not use words, the whole period will be forgotten. Therefore, we had to use them, *faute de mieux*.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean you didn't want to write those books?

WIESEL

I didn't want to write a book on the Holocaust. To write

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such a book, to be responsible for such experiences, for such words—I didn't want that. I wanted to write a commentary on the Bible, to write about the Talmud, about celebration, about the great eternal subjects: love and happiness.

INTERVIEWER

But you had no choice?

WIESEL

Exactly. I had to. It wasn't voluntary. None of us wanted to write. Therefore when you read a book on the Holocaust, written by a survivor, you always feel this ambivalence. On one hand, he feels he must. On the other hand, he feels . . . if only I didn't have to.

INTERVIEWER

What happens when this conflict occurs inside of you? Does it change the nature of the work?

WIESEL

No, because the work itself then reflects the conflict. I incorporate it. Take *The Oath*, a novel set at the beginning of the century, about a village and ritual murder, nothing about the Holocaust. But then on another level, it is the Holocaust—not of the Jews but of the world. That's why I called the village Kolvillàg. Villàg in Hungarian means world, and Kol in Hebrew means all—the entire world.

INTERVIEWER

On one hand there is the almost elemental force to write about something you don't want to write about; on the other, there are the celebrations, which you enjoy writing about.

WIESEL

Oh, that I love to do.

INTERVIEWER

What about the process of each? Is it a struggle, for in-

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stance, to get up each morning to write about something you would prefer not to write about?

WIESEL

It depends. I don't have many examples of writing about the Holocaust because I haven't written that much about it. But there is never a struggle in the morning. It's a pleasant agony. I am myself only when I work. I work for four hours without interruption. Then I stop for my studies. But these four hours are really mine. It is a struggle when I have to cut. I reduce nine hundred pages to one hundred sixty pages. I also enjoy cutting. I do it with a masochistic pleasure although even when you cut, you don't. Writing is not like painting where you add. It is not what you put on the canvas that the reader sees. Writing is more like a sculpture where you remove, you eliminate in order to make the work visible. Even those pages you remove somehow remain. There is a difference between a book of two hundred pages from the very beginning, and a book of two hundred pages which is the result of an original eight hundred pages. The six hundred pages are there. Only you don't see them.

INTERVIEWER

Have you destroyed the original nine hundred pages of *Night*?

WIESEL

No, I have them. Others I destroy; *Night* is not a novel, it's an autobiography. It's a memoir. It's testimony. Therefore I believe it should be kept and one day I may publish it because I have no right not to. It's not mine.

INTERVIEWER

After *Night*, why did you move away from the Holocaust?

WIESEL

If I moved away from the theme of the Holocaust it was to protect it. I didn't want to abuse words; I didn't want to

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repeat words. I want to surround the subject with a fence of *kedushah*, of sacredness. To me the sanctuary of Jewish history is there; therefore I wrote other things in order not to write about that. I wrote all kinds of novels and books on all kinds of subjects in order not to write about the Holocaust. I wrote about the Bible, Hasidism, Russian Jews. Somehow it was almost a conscious effort to go as far away as possible from the subject, to keep it as a block of silence.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote on the subject of asceticism in your doctoral dissertation. Why has that never been published?

WIESEL

It wasn't that urgent. I write under pressure. Every book that I have written corresponds to a certain immediacy. *The Accident* is about suicide; *Dawn* is urgent, political action; *The Jews of Silence*, Russian Jewry; *Beggar in Jerusalem*, war, isolation, survival. The dissertation on asceticism—Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism—can wait. Also, I never finished the degree. I didn't really want to become a teacher. I became a journalist. In order to go on with my studies I needed an income from somewhere to pay my tuition. So I continued writing for newspapers. Later on, when I did become a teacher, whether I had a Ph.D. or not was superfluous. I received Ph.D.'s without asking for them.

INTERVIEWER

What attracted you to the subject of asceticism?

WIESEL

I have always been attracted to mysticism, cabbala. Of course I didn't know any aspect but the Jewish one. I had a teacher who was a mystic. We tried all kinds of things together in mysticism. Later, I discovered that what all the religions had in common was suffering. Suffering is a basic problem in history or anti-history—how we deal with suffering. After I began exploring the subject, all kinds of avenues opened. I

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realized that Christianity is almost solely based on suffering. Then I wondered about the oriental religions.

INTERVIEWER

During this period when you were studying in Paris, I know that you were greatly influenced by the existentialists. Was your exposure to them through books or in more personal ways?

WIESEL

First through books and then personally. I had never read novels before. The Talmud, but not novels. I discovered novels in Paris. And the novels then were existential ones. Kafka on one hand, Dostoyevsky on the other. And Malraux, Camus, Sartre. In those times a new Camus was an event in your life. People were waiting. I was waiting for the new Camus, the new Malraux, the new Mauriac, the new Montherlant. But I also met some of them. I was a student and they came to the university. Camus at that time was an editor of *Combat*. I was already, so to speak, a journalist. He was accessible; I saw him. Mauriac became a friend of mine; Gabriel Marcel, a Christian version of Buber, I knew. But the influence was really books.

INTERVIEWER

In books such as *Souls on Fire* you describe Hasidism in an almost existential way. Hasidism was existential, you seem to be saying.

WIESEL

More or less. Born in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe, Hasidism gave hope to hopeless Jews while emphasizing the notion that the way to God is through one's fellowman. Hasidism then was an existential experience. And that's why it was so great and so sudden. It wasn't philosophically clear to the Hasidim: the Hasid of Pshiskhe didn't know that he was living a philosophical event, or engaged in a philosophical debate, yet *we* know that he was.

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INTERVIEWER

But there are differences. You imply in your writings that there is more joy, more mystical involvement in Hasidism than in existentialism.

WIESEL

Not in Hasidism but in my own work. I couldn't add to Hasidism. It doesn't need me to be enriched, but in my work—certainly. My characters are Hasidim who are unwittingly influenced by existentialism; or the other way around, existentialists, young people, often not knowing what they are, who are influenced by Hasidism.

INTERVIEWER

Your characters seem a step beyond the existential characters.

WIESEL

Because they are Hasidim. My characters express themselves that way even if they aren't Jewish. In *The Town Beyond the Wall*, Pedro, who is not Jewish, is an existentialist Hasid. Or Gregor in *The Gates of the Forest*. Most of my characters have this mixture of both.

INTERVIEWER

Are all the characters in your books imaginary?

WIESEL

In my novels, but not in my non-fiction. I don't want to mislead. If I say it's a memoir, it's a memoir. If it's a novel, it's a novel. If I write about Rav Mordechai Shushani, I must make it clear he existed. That's why I added another chapter about him in *One Generation After*.

INTERVIEWER

Have any of your women characters been real?

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WIESEL

Not in my novels. I am too personal, too private. I don't talk about things that really happened to me. I like to be discreet about others, about myself.

INTERVIEWER

Did Pedro exist in any form?

WIESEL

No, Pedro is the ideal friend or the friend idealized. You write only about people you don't have, people you want to have.

INTERVIEWER

What about Moshe the Madman who reappears in your novels?

WIESEL

He represents the ultimate mystical madness of man. He is an archetypal character in my books. I have very few types in my novels. I build a world and people it with strange characters and they are always the same. Sometimes I take a projector, a flashlight, and illuminate one, and then the others are secondary characters. Other times I do the opposite.

INTERVIEWER

Your characters frequently assist other people when they need help. But in *The Oath* Moshe didn't help at the very time he could have. Why?

WIESEL

We are impotent; we are helpless. There is not much we can do. So we speak and we get mad. But madness can be anger, or madness can be clinical insanity, in which case it is destructive, or mystical madness, which is helpful. Moshe in my books is always mystical. Mystical madness is by nature a redemptive madness. It becomes a vehicle for redemption, while clinical madness is destructive.

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INTERVIEWER

Doesn't mystical madness contain the possiblity of man isolating himself?

WIESEL

It means solitude and isolation. But instead of becoming less sensitive to others, the person becomes more sensitive.

INTERVIEWER

If a man withdraws for twenty years, and sees only a few disciples, is that becoming more or less sensitive?

WIESEL

That's an exception. The Kotzker Rebbe was an exception. Most Hasidic Rebbes moved together with their disciples. They became saintlier and more mystical too, profoundly mystical, together with the community, not outside of it.

INTERVIEWER

Do you try to approach the state of mystical madness when you write?

WIESEL

No, it would be presumptuous to say that. Of course, I try to enter my characters; they enter me. When I write about Moshe the Madman, I try to see him. Very often I do. But he was a real man. I move him around. I hear his voice, and I see his eyes. I am burned by his madness.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think about the question of the madness of the artist?

WIESEL

What is good for me is not necessarily good for someone else. Writing is so personal, so profoundly and terribly personal. Your entire personality goes into every word. The hesitation between one word and another is filled with many

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centuries, much space. And you deal with it one way, because of what you are, and somebody else deals with it another way. There are no rules. Even technically, some writers need all kinds of idiosyncracies. One took a wet cloth to his forehead; another had to get drunk; a third had to take drugs; Hemingway stood, another was sitting, another was lying. Would you say there are precepts that you have to sit or lie?

INTERVIEWER

And you?

WIESEL

I am disciplined, hard-working. I have no superstitions. I conjure the perils.

INTERVIEWER

When you begin a book, is there a particular approach you use?

WIESEL

Literature is a tone. It is a melody. If I find the melody of the book, the book is written. I remember *The Town Beyond the Wall*: I wrote one page—I remember exactly what time it was—I wrote one page and I knew the book was finished. I didn't know what I was going to say—I never do—but I knew the book was done, or waiting to be done.

INTERVIEWER

You speak of melody. How would you describe it?

WIESEL

Every book has its own. It's more than simple rhythm. It's like a musical key, major or minor, but more so. If you have that key, you know you can go on—the book is there. It's a matter of time. Before I begin to know more or less what I want to say: the ideas, the characters, the opinions. But the profound meaning of the book is within me; I still don't know what it is. And then, suddenly, at the corner of a sentence,

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an astonishing discovery: *this* is where I was trying to go.

INTERVIEWER

Do you choose the epigraphs before you begin or after?

WIESEL

Sometimes before, but usually after. At one point I understand what I am doing. Sometimes I stop in the middle of a book, sometimes at the end when I see something that strikes me, and that becomes the epigraph.

INTERVIEWER

I remember the epigraph from *The Gates of the Forest*:

> *When the great Rabbi Israel Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.*
>
> *Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer." And again the miracle would be accomplished.*
>
> *Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient." It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished. Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient." And it was sufficient.*
>
> *God made man because he loves stories.*

It troubled me that when you repeated this epigraph in *Souls on Fire*, you added that it was no longer enough: "The

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proof is that the threat has not been averted. Perhaps we are no longer able to tell the story. Could all of us be guilty? Even the survivors? Especially the survivors?" What accounts for this revision?

WIESEL

In *The Gates of the Forest* I tried to transmit a story. In *Souls on Fire* I changed the story. The context was different. In other words, I tried to do something more and it wasn't enough.

INTERVIEWER

You have said elsewhere that you write only when "the pillow is on fire." Does that mean that every time you write you feel obsessed?

WIESEL

Not always. I force myself to write. And often what I write is not good. I destroy it. Very, very often. But sometimes in the middle of writing, suddenly I feel it is there. Words are burning. Then I know it's good. But at times I can rewrite a page ten times without changing a word. I feel I have to do something. And I write and write and write.

INTERVIEWER

It must be very frustrating to rewrite a page ten times and not make any changes.

WIESEL

No, I did not come into this world in order to write a thousand pages. If I write one good page, it's enough. If I write the same page ten times in order to find in the eleventh time, the real page, I'm more than happy.

INTERVIEWER

What happens when you are blocked?

WIESEL

Usually the block occurs after the first book. In my case it

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didn't. But if it had I would not have been unhappy. I have never felt blocked.

INTERVIEWER

I imagine that your experience as a journalist helped.

WIESEL

Yes, the craft helped me to write anywhere—on a plane, in a cafe, while waiting.

INTERVIEWER

Unlike a Hemingway, your tools weren't so much the craft, as much as . . .

WIESEL

Knowledge. I needed knowledge. I knew that I needed ten years to start writing, and I was collecting all kinds of materials. That's why I studied mysticism, that's why I went to India, that's why I studied languages and literature—all these were tools. Psychology too. In France in those times if you studied philosophy, one of the components was psychology. So I took a course in psychopathology for two years, and the courses were given at the St. Anne Psychiatric hospital. It was a mental institution.

INTERVIEWER

And you are still developing your tools?

WIESEL

Of course, I study every day.

INTERVIEWER

I am intrigued by the fact that you still write in French.

WIESEL

It's my best medium. At this age—I don't think it's worthwhile to acquire another language or to perfect my English or abandon French which, after all, I mastered. It became my

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language. My constant challenge. The French language is Cartesian; it must be clear and concise. And yet I try to communicate something which is not precise or clear. I like that challenge. I also acquired French at a certain time of my life, after the war. If I had gone then, let us say, to England, I probably would have acquired English.

Before the war, I didn't even know that French existed. I knew simply that there were foreign words. After the war, I had a psychological need to acquire a new vehicle, a new tool—everything new, as though now I would start living again. And that's why French became so important. I can write an article in Yiddish but not a book. I have written one book in Yiddish, out of sentimental duty. I have written hundreds of articles in Hebrew. But I would not be able to write a book in Hebrew. I may feel inhibited. Isaiah wrote in Hebrew . . . and *I* write in Hebrew? In French I don't have such inhibitions. True, Racine wrote French and I write French, but I am not saying what Racine is saying. While as a Jew of my generation, I am probably trying to say what Jeremiah tried to say. And yet, if I had gone to Israel in 1945 instead of France, I would probably have written in Hebrew.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write in any other forms, such as poetry?

WIESEL

Not really, though I like to experiment in literature. That's why I wrote *Ani Maamim* as a poem. First I wrote the poem, then I gave it to Darius Milhaud. I wrote the words and he wrote the music. I went to Geneva once to see him. He was an old man and couldn't move. I sang the Hasidic *Ani Maamim*. I wanted him to hear it. He comes from a Sephardic family where they never sang this kind of *Ani Maamim*. That was the only contact. He worked alone; I worked alone. In *One Generation After*, I develop another genre: the dialogue. I bring the dialogue back in *A Jew Today*. What are these dialogues? They are dialogues with the dead. Nobody else listens, nobody else hears.

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INTERVIEWER

I want to pursue the subject of the dialogues, but for the moment I want to discuss other experiments you have made in literature. For instance, why did you write a play about Russian Jews instead of a novel?

WIESEL

Desperation. I had written the book, *The Jews of Silence.* It appeared in some ten languages and had no impact. The Jewish establishment didn't move. I went from one convention to another trying to alert people, in vain. I became desperate. I wanted to try something that no one else had tried. A report did not help Russian Jewry, a non-fiction book did not help, so I wrote a play—same results.

INTERVIEWER

I know you had some problems with the play in Israel.

WIESEL

The Habima Theatre produced it. They shortened it and added material from other books I have written. They changed the name to *The Jews of Silence*—they didn't know that I had written a book with the same title. They had promised a certain actor, a certain director, and suddenly they put before me a *fait accompli*. . . . They wrote me a letter which said, "Except for a few parts which we omitted and a few parts which we added, and except for a different director, and a different name, the play is the same." I wanted to stop it. It wasn't easy because I cannot hurt Israel. The play became a great commercial success in Israel. But it wasn't my play. I went on television and appealed to the public not to see it.

INTERVIEWER

As a result of the experience, have you decided not to write any more plays?

WIESEL

I just finished one! It's a kind of Purimschpiel, a play that

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was customarily performed on Purim, the annual day of fools, children, and beggars. Its title is *The Trial of God*, and it takes place somewhere in Russia in the year 1649. When I had written *Zalmen*, which deals with the plight of contemporary Russian Jewry, I thought it would be my only play. But you don't really decide. At one point, the subject comes and seizes you and imposes upon you its own rhythm, its own mode. I hinted in some of my books at a scene I had witnessed in the camp: God being judged by three rabbis. One day I decided that since I was the one who had witnessed it, I had to do justice to the theme. I wrote almost a full novel. It didn't work. I wrote a poem. It didn't work. I wrote a kind of dialogue, not a play, but a dialogue. It didn't work. Then I decided I would move the same theme back to the sixteenth century. And it worked. It's no longer in a camp, it's somewhere else. And it's no longer a tragedy but a comedy. It's a Purimschpiel. And the only way to do such a Purimschpiel, as a Purimschpiel, is a play. You can indict God on Yom Kippur; it's a tragedy. But indict God on Purim, it's not even a tragedy. It's much more. It goes one step beyond. It's laughter, philosophical laughter, metaphysical farce.

INTERVIEWER

You said that you tried different forms before you were satisfied with the Purimschpiel. I wonder why you have never written a film based on one of your novels and why they have never been made into films.

WIESEL

I have always resisted. I don't think it can be done. In one way I have no rights over my books. They all belong to my French publisher, Le Seuil. It's the general practice in France. Therefore options were often bought, even for *Night*. I didn't want that. I tried to sabotage the process. Usually it ends when the producer asks, "Would you like to write a script? Or would you like to advise?" Then I start explaining it's impossible.

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INTERVIEWER

It is very difficult to express mysticism on film.

WIESEL

It's not only mysticism. My books are either mystical books or, in the beginning, they were about the Holocaust. I don't believe either can be done on film. I don't believe they should be.

INTERVIEWER

Yet you participated in making the film "Sighet, Sighet."

WIESEL

That was a documentary. The producer went to my town and took stills. I simply narrated it in New York. This is a story I had written for *Legends of Our Time*. I simply took the text that had been published in *Commentary* and read it in a studio. The story describes my return to my hometown which I did not recognize. Not because it had changed so much, but quite the opposite: because it had *not* changed. Everything remained the same: the streets, gardens, houses, schools, shops . . . Only—the Jews were no longer there. They had all been driven out twenty years earlier, in 1944. And yet, the town seemed to get along without them.

INTERVIEWER

Would you ever make another documentary?

WIESEL

I would, but I wouldn't be involved in any other type of film.

INTERVIEWER

I have always thought *The Gates of the Forest* would make a superb movie—the descriptions of the "clouds which weighed upon the night."

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WIESEL

It was just bought again. But I don't think they will make it.

INTERVIEWER

If you were giving advice to a young writer, what would you tell him?

WIESEL

First, to read. I never taught creative writing courses. I believe in creative reading. That's what I am trying to teach—creative reading. I'd assign the Scripture and Midrash, Ovid and Kafka, Thomas Mann and Camus, Plato and André Schwarz-Bart. A writer must first know how to read. You can see whether a person is a writer by the way he reads a text, by the way he deciphers a text. I'd also say to a young writer, if you can choose not to write, don't. Nothing is as painful. From the outside, people think it's good; it's easy; it's romantic. Not at all. It's much easier not to write than to write. Except if you are a writer. Then you have no choice.

INTERVIEWER

What is your present routine? Do you spend most of your time in New York?

WIESEL

We live in New York. I teach in Boston. Once a week I go to Boston for a whole day. I teach and see my students. The rest of the time I work here, except when I go out of town to lecture, which I am doing less and less. Once a year I go to France. I used to go more often. I also go to Jerusalem once a year.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you live in New York?

WIESEL

We almost moved to Boston. But the few friends we have

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live in New York, and friends are important. Otherwise, I don't participate in a social life.

INTERVIEWER

What about your activities besides teaching and writing? For instance, are you still involved in helping Russian Jewry?

WIESEL

In the beginning my activities were more visible because no one else did anything. I published *The Jews of Silence* in 1965. And I returned to Moscow in 1966. As I said earlier, in those years it was impossible to make the Jewish organizations do anything. Until 1970, they refused even to establish an American Conference on Soviet Jewry. Now it's a *cause célèbre*. What do I do? I speak with senators and people who have power; I send friends to Russia to create contacts. Whatever can be done, I try to do.

INTERVIEWER

Why after the war did you not go on to Palestine from France?

WIESEL

I had no certificate. In 1946 when the Irgun blew up the King David Hotel, I decided I would like to join the underground. Very naïvely I went to the Jewish Agency in Paris. I got no further than the janitor who asked: "What do you want?" I said, "I would like to join the underground." He threw me out. About 1948 I was a journalist and helped one of the Yiddish underground papers with articles, but I was never a member of the underground.

INTERVIEWER

I am surprised to hear you say you wanted to join since the notion of killing is so foreign to you.

WIESEL

Still, at that point, I felt I had to do something. I could

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only hope that if I had become a member I would not have had to kill. In 1946 I wanted to do something. The Jewish people were awakening, and my place was with the Jewish people. Whatever the Jews were doing, I had to be with them. Everything about the underground was alien to me. I was against killing, against violence.

INTERVIEWER

A Christian friend of mine recently told me that by being in Israel in the wars of 1967 and 1973, I was indirectly helping to kill. . . .

WIESEL

I was there in 1967 and in 1973 too. But I didn't have a gun. I came to help the Israelis. To say that they were killers is not true. They were being killed as well. They were fighting. It's a paradox. I don't pretend to be able to solve the paradoxes in me. There are many paradoxes which are part of my life. I am absolutely a pacifist, against violence, surely against killing, and yet I am totally for Israel. Maybe because I believe that they really don't want to fight. And whenever they do, they don't fight as others do. They never celebrate their military heroes. In 1967, when they won, and it was a just war, they were sad. All the generals were sad. In 1973, they were so sad they didn't talk. I remember that when I came back from a one-day visit to the Golan Heights, I couldn't talk.

INTERVIEWER

Several people who have known you for a long time said that you have changed since your marriage and the birth of your son.

WIESEL

Of course. My son changed me. Once you bring life into the world, you must protect it. We must protect it by changing the world. There was more anger in me before. There still is, but now it's a different kind of anger. It's more positive.

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INTERVIEWER

At whom was the anger directed?

WIESEL

Everything. At history, at the world, at God, at myself, at whatever surrounded me.

INTERVIEWER

How did you express it?

WIESEL

I didn't, I contained it. All my writing was born out of anger. In order to contain it, I had to write. If I had not written, I would have exploded.

INTERVIEWER

The anger didn't have a particular focus? You weren't angry at the Germans or the past?

WIESEL

There was accumulated anger but not personal anger at Germans, or Poles, or Hungarians, or at the silent witnesses, at the silent onlookers. During those years, all that happened day after day and minute after minute intensified my anger. But I didn't show it. I didn't express it. I sublimated it by writing about something else, by writing about the glory of Jewish life, by writing about the joy of Hasidism, by writing about the Bible.

INTERVIEWER

Then you were aware that the anger disappeared once your son was born?

WIESEL

It didn't disappear. It is still present. Except now it's on a different level. Today I occasionally let it burst out. I speak up and fight for Israel, for Russian Jews and so forth. I'm angrier now than then.

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INTERVIEWER

Has your son enabled you to see a joyous side of life?

WIESEL

Both joyous and not. When I see my son, I am full of joy, full of fear. I realize how vulnerable life is, how vulnerable Jewish life is. The past has never disappeared. I imagine other fathers look at their children the way I look at mine. I feel real fear. Whenever he is not at home, I am afraid. I am sure this fear is rooted in a deeper fear. At the same time, nothing gives me as much joy as my son.

INTERVIEWER

You have said that you wrote *The Accident* with a sense of urgency because of the question of suicide. Did you ever contemplate suicide?

WIESEL

I did, but not that way. After the war, there was a point when I felt I could have slid into death. I was sick. It was a strange moment. I haven't written about it yet. I felt on the edge. I was seeing the land of the dead, and I was no longer alive. It was strong, dark, powerful. I knew I was dying, and if I had not resisted, I would have died. The resistance itself was a conscious decision.

INTERVIEWER

Was that in Paris?

WIESEL

First, in Germany. I was sick for some ten days. I was in a coma. I had blood poisoning. Out of twenty thousand people who were liberated, at least five thousand died in those days. We all had blood poisoning. After five or six days of total starvation, we were given the wrong food by Americans who liberated the camp. In my case, it was even worse. They distributed ham or some kind of pork. If anyone had given me pork during the war, I would have eaten it. After, when I was

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already free, I brought the pork, or ham, or spam, whatever it was, to my lips, and I got blood poisoning. But other people who didn't have these problems or these inhibitions, or the psychosomatic reactions that I had, also died of blood poisoning, stomach trouble, and so forth.

INTERVIEWER

You also had a near-fatal accident in New York.

WIESEL

Yes. When I was hit by a taxi in New York, I was brought to Roosevelt Hospital, which didn't want to accept me. I was in a coma. I didn't have any money. I didn't have anything. They sent me away in an ambulance, and we went to New York Hospital. Paul Braunstein, the chief of surgery, saved my life. *The Accident* is dedicated to him.

INTERVIEWER

Do you still have difficulty walking for more than five minutes?

WIESEL

Yes. That's why I sit when I lecture, instead of standing. I can walk a maximum of ten minutes. After ten minutes, I am tired.

INTERVIEWER

I want to return to an earlier subject. You spoke of your dialogues with the dead and of being on the edge of life. Are you still near the abyss?

WIESEL

I haven't left it. I don't think anyone can, once you have been there. There isn't a day, there simply isn't a day without my thinking of death or of looking into death, darkness, or seeing that fire or trying to understand what happened. There isn't a day. I don't write about it. I don't speak about it. I try not to touch the subject at all, but it is present.

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INTERVIEWER

It is like carrying around a nightmare.

WIESEL

I believe that all the survivors are mad. One time or another their madness will explode. You cannot absorb that much madness and not be influenced by it. That is why the children of survivors are so tragic. I see them in school. They don't know how to handle their parents. They see that their parents are traumatized: they scream and don't react normally.

At Stanford, a boy came up to me crying and sobbing. He took me aside and told me his father was a survivor. "Will he ever stop being a survivor?" he asked me. The children are now more tragic than their parents.

INTERVIEWER

I wonder if your struggle also involves melancholy, as in the title of your book: *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy*.

WIESEL

That's mainly the Hasidic struggle. I identify with the Hasidic experience. When I lecture, I don't speak about subjects that make people cry. I don't want people to cry; I want them to laugh. I want them to sing. They cried enough. Also, it's too easy to cry—instant catharsis. Nothing is easier than that. I want them to laugh.

INTERVIEWER

That seems outside your character. I don't see you expressing laughter.

WIESEL

You don't express laughter, you communicate it. You cannot express it because once you do, it is no longer laughter. Bergson said the joke you explain is no longer a joke. Philosophical laughter may be a response.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you try to communicate philosophical laughter when you appear before audiences?

WIESEL

No, I try to teach. I am a teacher. My main objective in lecturing is to teach. I like to teach. I don't like to give one lecture and go away. At the YM-YWHA in New York the same people come year after year. Part of my knowledge is invested in them. If you ask what I want to achieve, it's to create an awareness, which is already the beginning of teaching.

INTERVIEWER

What is the connection between your teaching and your writing?

WIESEL

Teaching helps me. If it were to entertain, I would stop because my first commitment is to writing. Teaching forces me to prepare. I prepare a lot. Fortunately, I always use my lectures later in my books. I can't afford to waste research, so I use it.

INTERVIEWER

Earlier you spoke of the Hasid in you. What is your relationship today with the Hasidic community?

WIESEL

Obviously not what it was when I was very young. Then it was simple. I had a Rebbe which, of course, is Hasidic for 'rabbi,' and he was my teacher, my master, my guide. That Rebbe died, his son died, and his children I no longer know. But still, in my memory, I am faithful to the first Rebbe I knew as a child. Now I feel at home within every Hasidic community. Not all accept me. The Satmarer, very fanatic, were close to me when I was a child. The Satmar Rebbe comes from my town. His assistants are childhood friends. Still they don't accept me. They don't accept any Jew who is not part of their

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sect. For them, the Jewish people number maybe ten or twenty thousand souls. I feel at home with the others. I feel more at home among Hasidim than among secular Jews because of my childhood experiences.

INTERVIEWER

Do you spend much time with the Hasidic community?

WIESEL

I stay in close touch with Hasidim, but I go less to their synagogues. I go to the Lubavitch "evenings" because they are so colorful. The Lubavitch community is in Brooklyn; its head is Rebbe Menahem-Mendel Schneerson. Thousands of followers gather there on those festive occasions to listen to their Master—and sing with him. I used to go more often. Now I'm more involved in books, Hasidic books.

INTERVIEWER

There seems to be an irreconcilable split between Hasidic Jews and secular Jews.

WIESEL

There always was. The opponents of the Hasidic movement were strong. Hasidism won because of its fervor. Also its sense of history: Hasidism came at a certain time in a certain place. Today, Hasidism is gaining, especially among young people. I dislike the extremists of either side though. I dislike all fanatics. They exist within the Hasidic community but at least they are a small minority. The majority is tolerant, and its attitude toward secular Jews is kinder than it was in the beginning.

Now, being almost fifty years old and without the innocence I had when I was really a Hasid, I would make the tradition stricter. I would like the Hasid to start by learning. Learning is more important to Judaism than anything I know. To learn and to learn and to learn; then to find himself or herself in the Hasidic framework. It should not be at the expense of learning. In other words, what I don't like today is, to put it

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coarsely, the phony Hasidism, the phony mysticism. Many students say, "Teach me mysticism." It's a joke. If you want to study mysticism, start by studying the Bible, then the prophets, then Midrash, and then the Talmud, and then and then and then, and finally at a certain age, you enter mysticism. Today they don't even know how to read Hebrew. And they come and say, teach me mysticism. Some of them think it's easy to be a Hasid because they don't know what it means; to them it's a mystical movement. Of course, not all. Some are enlightened and learned.

INTERVIEWER

Can one learn mysticism?

WIESEL

No, and yet there is no other way. By that I mean if you don't learn, you cannot. That doesn't mean if you learn you are a mystic. But if you don't, you are not.

INTERVIEWER

Aren't there people like Kazantzakis who have been spontaneous mystics?

WIESEL

Kazantzakis was a great scholar. You can have a mystical temperament, an inclination. If, on the strength of that, you go on studying, fine. But if you don't sudy, you never will. Mysticism without study is impossible.

INTERVIEWER

I suppose I was thinking of some of the simpler forms of mysticism, the peasants of Europe, for instance, who have a mystical experience and the Church declares it a miracle.

WIESEL

That's a passing thing. Mysticism is more serious than that. Miracles in mysticism don't occupy such an important place. It's a metaphor, for the peasants, for the crowds, to impress

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people. What does mysticism really mean? It means the way to attain knowledge. It's close to philosophy, except in philosophy you go horizontally while in mysticism you go vertically. You plunge into it. Philosophy is a slow process of logic and logical discourse: A bringing B bringing C and so forth. In mysticism you can jump from A to Z. But the ultimate objective is the same. It's knowledge. It's truth.

INTERVIEWER

Is Indian or eastern mysticism different?

WIESEL

Yes, but even there it's study. They study the *Ghitas* and the *Upanishads* and we study our texts, the *Zohar* and other mystical works. Their relationship between student and teacher is more strenuous and also more intense than ours. In our case, one teacher may have many students, many disciples. There it's one to one. The real guru has one student. And their secret is one secret. The ritual is different.

INTERVIEWER

You once said you don't write *about* God. What do you mean?

WIESEL

God comes in here and there in my books. I oppose Him. I fight Him. I quarrel with Him. Some of my characters pray to Him. But when I say I don't speak *about* God, it means theologically, the whole theological art, which is a way of reaching the attributes of God: What is He doing? Who is He?

INTERVIEWER

Are these questions often unsaid, unwritten in your books?

WIESEL

Yes. I am very concerned, even obsessed, with God.

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INTERVIEWER

So by implication you are doing what you don't want to be doing?

WIESEL

Again yes, but not with words. I rarely speak about God. To God, yes. I protest against Him. I shout at Him. But to open a discourse about the qualities of God, about the problems that God imposes, theodicy, no. And yet He is there, in silence, in filagree.

INTERVIEWER

In *Night*, you wrote, "Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my Faith forever." Yet faith permeates your work.

WIESEL

This may sound like a contradiction but it is not. I had to include those words in *Night* and I had to write the later books. If it were the other way around, it would be a contradiction. But *Night* was a beginning and an end. Furthermore, the problem of faith is never solved. In *Night*, only those who did not believe in God did not deny Him. I could say now too—only those who do not believe in God have easy faith in Him.

INTERVIEWER

If each character in *Messengers of God* were compared with God, each character would come out ahead.

WIESEL

Of course. If I have to choose between God and man, I will choose man because God wins. So what's the point? To help God win? He will win anyway. We are all His victims. But before being His victims, we are His associates.

INTERVIEWER

Do you praise Him?

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WIESEL

I have great difficulties praying, even the simple prayers. To read a prayer book, especially today, in English translation, makes me feel uneasy. I have great difficulties. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Wouldn't a Rebbe consider that a blasphemy?

WIESEL

No, I think a real Rebbe would say the same thing. But then he would pray. The Pshiskhe Rebbe used to say that he was angry at God all the time. But afterwards, he would pray. I am angry too, and I say that I have difficulties praying, but I go to the synagogue with Hasidim, and I stay with them and occasionally pray with them.

INTERVIEWER

Is that a Kierkegaardian leap of faith?

WIESEL

Kierkegaard stresses God. I stress the Hasidim, the Jews with whom I pray. Sometimes I go to the synagogue not to be with God, but to be with the Jews.

INTERVIEWER

What is there in Judaism that has enabled so many to accept on blind faith the continual record of God's "inhumanity" to man?

WIESEL

At the very beginning of our history we suffered. We began in suffering, and the suffering continued into our history. Second, as a challenge, a strange defiance, a mutual defiance. God and the people of Israel somehow try to see who will tire the other out first.

INTERVIEWER

But God always wins, as you said earlier.

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WIESEL

Not always. God does not always win because God says in the Talmud I want to lose; I want to be defeated by my own children. In all kinds of legends He loses. But in history He wins because we all die. Malraux said something beautiful: At the end, death is the victor, but as long as I live, with every breath I take, death is defeated. In our tradition, I would phrase it differently: Man, as long as he lives, is immortal. One minute before his death he shall be immortal. But one minute later, God wins.

INTERVIEWER

Doesn't God also win if man is alive, but barely alive; if he is suffering?

WIESEL

No. If man suffers he can still speak up. Job did. Jeremiah did. However, when God's unfair practices enter, God may always say that He wanted them. There is no superiority in any independent rebellion against God.

INTERVIEWER

So man loses again?

WIESEL

Of course he loses again. He cannot win.

INTERVIEWER

Then what is the point of rebellion?

WIESEL

Here we come to the existential rebellion. I lose and still I rebel—for my own dignity. Although I know I will never defeat God, I still fight Him. Suddenly the role of man is greatly enhanced. Therefore his defeat is not really a defeat.

INTERVIEWER

Is art too a form of rebellion against God?

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WIESEL

Absolutely. Not only against God. Art means rebellion. Art means to say no.

INTERVIEWER

In what way?

WIESEL

A painter would say, that's not the way I see nature. I will show you how I see nature. Furthermore, your Nature, God, dies. Mine will stay. If it's Picasso, he will say, man doesn't have two eyes but three; if it's Braque, he will say, man doesn't have these kinds of lines, he has different kinds of lines; Goya will say man is cruel, but not the way you think he is; if it's in poetry, the poet will say no to prose, life is poetry. I say to God, you want me to do this, I will not. You want me to forget my village, I will not. Art means for man to say no to death, too.

INTERVIEWER

So the artist is able to defeat God through the immortality of his art?

WIESEL

Yes, if you confound God and death, which is quite plausible. The *Malaach Ha Mavet*, the Angel of Death, and God together because both, so to say, are immortal. Except in *Had Ga Ya* on Pesach [Passover], when we say that God killed the Angel of Death. Still, I have doubts. Let me give an example. I write books because there *was* a tragedy. I try to bring some characters back and defeat death, defeat the killer, defeat God. But one day of one child weighs more than all the books that I could ever write. So what kind of a victory is it? Beckett once told me he found a manuscript of *Quand Malone meurt*. On the manuscript he found an epigraph, which is not printed in the book: "*En désespoir de cause*," which means that's the only thing I can do—write.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you mean to say that because God sets the parameters we have no choice? The only way we can defeat Him is through something beyond the self—art?

WIESEL

If there were a domain then it would be art. But why defeat Him in that case?

INTERVIEWER

Not for its own sake, certainly not for His sake, but for our sake.

WIESEL

Why should that be a goal?

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps to show that we can create in life something that can live beyond us.

WIESEL

But why against God? Why not life-centered? Man-centered?

INTERVIEWER

To elevate man?

WIESEL

Must we take on God to elevate man? Why don't we take on man to elevate man? Unless you accept a religious exigency in man, God is much less important in art. God is important in the Bible, in life, but not in art. Unless you admit that there is some religious aspect to art, which is possible. Or unless you yourself are religiously motivated.

INTERVIEWER

Do you consider your art a religion?

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WIESEL

My writing may be a response to a religious need, not a religion.

INTERVIEWER

I have thought that you and Joyce have many parallels. Even your words are often similar. At the end of *A Portrait of the Artist*, he writes of silence and cunning. Would you say that in some ways his transposition of Catholicism to art is similar to your transposition of Judaism to art?

WIESEL

Not entirely. My preoccupations are not his preoccupations. My preoccupation—it depends whether in the novels, the memoirs, or the non-fiction—is memory. God being the source of memory, I'm preoccupied with God. Why the good are punished and the wicked rewarded is the second question. The first question is, How can I achieve a situation in which the victims, all the victims, can enter memory? That is my major preoccupation—memory, the kingdom of memory. I want to protect and enrich that kingdom, glorify that kingdom and serve it. God from the religious point of view is part of that kingdom. But my concerns go far beyond it.

INTERVIEWER

Memory is really the uncreated memory of the race?

WIESEL

Of the species. If I could remember, what would I remember? What would I dare to remember? The fact that we have selective memories may be bad or may be good. I would lose my mind if I remembered everything. Every child, every old man, every sick man, every victim, I would go insane. Here again we have a dichotomy, the ambivalent attitude. On one hand, I want to preserve every single aspect, every gesture, every look, every word; and on the other hand, I would fail.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you want to preserve the past?

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WIESEL

For them and for me. If I am here and they are not, they must be in me.

INTERVIEWER

And why for you?

WIESEL

Because without them what would I be?

INTERVIEWER

If it's the memory of the species, how do you know where to begin?

WIESEL

In the beginning, in my own mind, in my memory—that's why I go back to childhood. Strangely enough, I have always been attracted to beginnings: the beginning of the world, the beginning of the Hasidic movement, the beginning of the cabalistic movement, the beginning of the war, the beginning of my life in my shtetl. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Then you are similar in some ways to Proust.

WIESEL

Oh, I love Proust. We all learned from him how to go back in time. The difference is that Proust stayed in his room, and he observed himself. He was Proust lying in his bed looking at Proust at the window who was looking at Proust in bed. In our generation's case, we are always in the middle. We are never on the outside. Whatever happens, happens to us.

INTERVIEWER

How do you differ from a chronicler?

WIESEL

I don't. To be a chronicler would be a great honor.

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INTERVIEWER

Similar to the character of your father, in *The Oath*?

WIESEL

Yes. I want to recreate. I want to record.

INTERVIEWER

Why not journalism?

WIESEL

It's a different kind of recording. Journalism is too immediate, too monotonous and superficial. A chronicler is alone in his room and writes. A journalist is rarely alone. He writes about other people, and the essential is always missed. I was a journalist long enough to know. You write only of the fleeting moment—the most dramatic, the most visible, not the underlying reasons.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think in some way you will be able to recapture the past?

WIESEL

I am trying, like Sisyphus. He knows he will not succeed, but he is trying. I know I will never recapture the past in its entirety because no matter what, the past is richer than the future.

INTERVIEWER

It has been said that you write in an eternal present, but it seems that you are really writing in an eternal past.

WIESEL

An eternal past expressed in the present. To me time, as an element of art, is the most challenging concept, and therefore I play with it. I run from the present to the past, especially in French where there are so many pasts—*passé défini*, *passé composé*, and so forth. I run from tense to tense to show this vertical approach to the past.

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INTERVIEWER

Are you waiting for the Messiah?

WIESEL

Not for a personal one. But I am waiting for something. It may be forever, but I would not want to stop waiting.

INTERVIEWER

Why?

WIESEL

Life would be empty. If everything were concentrated in the present, there would be no possibility of transcending the present. We are suspended between the absolute past and the absolute future over which we have no control. It's a creeping flame. Sometimes it bends one way, sometimes the other way. Sometimes it brings light and sometimes fire—life or destruction. Take away the waiting, what remains? I think the Messianic concept, which is the Jewish offering to mankind, is a great victory. What does it mean? It means that history has a sense, a meaning, a direction; it goes somewhere, and necessarily in a good direction—the Messiah. At least we would like to think that history is going in that direction. But I think it's going in the wrong direction. We are heading towards catastrophe. I think the world is going to pieces. I am very pessimistic. Why? Because the world hasn't been punished yet, and the only punishment that could be adequate is the nuclear destruction of the world.

INTERVIEWER

The Jews have been punished.

WIESEL

The Jews, but not the world. And if the world were punished now we would be punished as well. I don't want the world to be punished, anything but that. Yet logically there must be punishment, the signs point to a terrible catastrophe. Cambodia can happen today. A million people

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liquidated there, and nobody cares, nobody shouts. The Cambodians stopped all telephone communications with the outside world. They uprooted everybody from the cities. People died of starvation and hunger. They broke up families. They broke up communities. It was genocide, and nobody paid any attention. It doesn't stand to reason. It cannot go without punishment. If you think of the Holocaust, of course there must be punishment. And think of all the other things that happen—pollution. In two villages of New Jersey, people suddenly develop cancer. Why there? A friend of mine in New York told me he has hundreds of people working for him and in the last seven months, five families were struck with cancer. We create and produce many nuclear weapons. Can we continue with impunity? Tomorrow a man may push a button in the Kremlin or Washington; or worse, Idi Amin, for five hundred million dollars, may buy an atomic bomb. And he would push the button. He is crazy. Or Quadaffi who is a fanatic and crazy. Imagine Ahmad Shukairy, Yasir Arafat's predecessor and the chief of a group that was a forerunner of the PLO, having the bomb in 1967. Don't you think he would have used it? Nobody thinks of these possibilities. There is an apathy born out of fear. People don't want to face these things. People prefer not to think.

INTERVIEWER

Is the punishment going to come from God or from man?

WIESEL

From man. Ourselves. I don't think that God will intervene. It will be mankind. It's almost the logical outgrowth of the situation. Strangely enough, the only thing that can save mankind would be a real awareness of the Holocaust. I don't believe anything else has the moral power. That's why I reacted so strongly towards the television dramatization of the Holocaust. You don't take such an event and reduce it. The Holocaust was a shield. We were protected. The Jewish people were shielded, as was the world, because of that event, for forty years. Demystify it or banalize it, it loses its power. If it's

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something you can't imagine, something that you can't reproduce, it has power.

INTERVIEWER

Can we do anything?

WIESEL

Even if we cannot, we must. That's why I am teaching; that's why I am writing. It's not only because I am near the abyss and I see the dead. It is also because I see the living.

INTERVIEWER

Is there anyone who is doing what should be done and saying what should be said?

WIESEL

Nobody possesses the total truth. We all have fragments, sparks. The problem is that truth has become something that doesn't interest people. I come from a tradition where truth mattered more than anything in the world. Today truth is not a commodity. What matters is image, efficiency, rapidity . . . truth has disappeared. After my review of the television program about the Holocaust appeared in the *New York Times*, I received a very moving letter from one of the most important judges in the country. He said that he agreed with everything I wrote, but also understood that the program did some good. But what about truth? Truth becomes something we can do without. Let me push it to the limits: If truth were bad for the Jews but half-truth good for the Jews, these people would say better half-truth than truth. I can't accept that. People don't have convictions anymore. I don't know what kind of a generation this is . . . maybe it is still the result of my generation. Policy is being made in Washington in response to polls. The same thing is true of our Jewish leadership—no convictions. It's only what's favorable or favorably received that influences policy decisions. Yet here and there are people—Sartre in France, for instance. When he was old and blind, I had respect for the man. I don't agree with every-

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thing he said, but he had convictions. He knew what he was saying. Camus was another. Absolute convictions. I respected him throughout. There are people in this category. Some are less known, writers and scholars. Yet the sum of their fragments is still not the truth. And that is tragic.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't that always going to be the case?

WIESEL

That's why life is not a happy event in the absolute sense of the word. It's always a tragedy, by definition. It's short. We come from nowhere; we go nowhere. And in the eyes of the pyramids, as Napoleon would say, what are we? Rebbe Nahman of Bratzlav once saw a man running. His name was Haim. He called him and said: "Haim, look outside, what do you see?" He said, "I see the clouds in the sky." "What else do you see?" "I see horses and wagons and people running." "Haim, Haim, a hundred years from now there will be clouds and people will run and horses will run and I will not be here and you will not be here, then why are you running?"

INTERVIEWER

I think that people allow themselves to be fooled because if they accepted the truth, in some cases, they wouldn't be able to go on living.

WIESEL

Truth is a tremendous passion. It can become a positive passion. I can understand why people fight in the name of truth and do anything in the name of truth—even things I wouldn't do. But when they act in the name of something that is not truth, that is the problem.

INTERVIEWER

Why would somebody passionately seek out such a horror as the truth of Cambodia?

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WIESEL

Because it happens, because it's true, because I am a contemporary of the victims and of the killers. It's a small planet. How can I not know? The same thing happened during the Holocaust. An Israeli army major wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the Holocaust; he went through the newspapers, and he lost his mind—literally. He had to be institutionalized. He had read the American Jewish papers, the *Forward*, and other publications. On the front pages he read reports of the ghettos being liquidated, communities being massacred, and on the inside pages he found ads—Go and enjoy your summer in the Catskills . . . See the comedian Mr. So and So. . . . A student at City College went through all the bulletins of one particular synagogue, one of the most famous in New York. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising began on April 19th, it was the eve of Pesach; two days later on the 21st, the *New York Times* had a full story. Not one mention was made in the bulletin in subsequent weeks of the Warsaw Ghetto. The sermon a week later did not include the Warsaw Ghetto. I don't understand it. How could they go on? The same thing I don't understand today. How can we go on knowing of Cambodia?

INTERVIEWER

Somewhere people listen and in their own ways will try to do something.

WIESEL

I wish. I ask Moynihan, Kissinger, others. It's become my obsession, whomever I meet. No matter what we talk about, at one point I must come back to Cambodia. The United Nations didn't even take up the subject. It's like a sealed wagon in the time of the Holocaust, and I don't like to use images, just like that, from the Holocaust. The country has become a sealed wagon and nobody cares. But then why should they? If the world was indifferent a generation ago, why should it care now?

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INTERVIEWER

Maybe that's why we are going to be punished.

WIESEL

It's already the beginning of the punishment.

INTERVIEWER

You have written that every generation has its own prophet. Who is our prophet?

WIESEL

He is a dead prophet and a living prophet. As a Jew I would say that our prophets are in the past. Jeremiah is my prophet. To me he is still alive. And my prophet is also someone whom I knew during the war. He was a child. I never knew his name. I never knew where he came from, but we were together in the camp. I can see him walking. I can hear him talking. He uses simple words. He says, "Are we going to have soup tonight? Are we going to have potatoes? Are we going to have bread tonight? Are we going to live tomorrow?" He is the prophet of my generation.

INTERVIEWER

He is dead?

WIESEL

Yes.

INTERVIEWER

And the prophet of the Gentiles?

WIESEL

The same. Except the problems that I have to face in regard to this boy are not the same as the ones they have to face in regard to him. When I think of him, I feel compassion and love but no remorse. When they think of him, they feel remorse as well. It's not because of me that he was there but because of them.

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INTERVIEWER

So we are lost, truly lost.

WIESEL

Unless we accept small measures of victory. There is Israel, for us at least. What no other generation had, we have. We have Israel in spite of all the dangers, the threats and the wars, we have Israel. We can go to Jerusalem. Generations and generations could not and we can. In my time, anyone could beat up a Jew with impunity. We were beaten up twice a year. If a Jew was killed in a pogrom, who cared? Today it's not that easy. Again the paradox. We never had better conditions, not even 2,000 years ago in the time of the Temple. At the same time, we have the weight of memories—visions of horror.

INTERVIEWER

What can we do?

WIESEL

My favorite expression, the most Jewish of all Jewish expressions is "and yet, and yet." It's bad, and yet; it's good, and yet. I choose for myself the role of teacher, storyteller, witness, sometimes they overlap. And you hope that the abyss will not grow. You don't try to reduce it; it would be unfair to the dead. But at least you hope that the abyss will not grow larger.

INTERVIEWER

Walking close to the abyss, your dialogues with the dead, what price have you paid for what you once referred to as "messianic experiments"?

WIESEL

I as a person? That is irrelevant. For some of us, survivors, death is a constant measurement. I am trying to look for simplicity, for simple joys and small miracles. I am looking for them but once they are there, I discard them. If you are a survivor, you are in a way invulnerable. At the same time, you are more vulnerable because you are more fragile, more sensi-

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tive. Wounds hurt more. That is the price. It is high. There is a paradox: nobody is stronger, nobody is weaker than someone who came back. There is nothing you can do to such a person because whatever you could do is less than what has already been done to him. We have already paid the price.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know you are not going to fall?

WIESEL

You can't know. That is the danger. The rate of suicides among survivors is very high, especially those who wrote. Terrible things happened to these people. For them every moment is a victory. At the same time despair is a temptation. And it is powerful. In French there is a word for it: *le vertige*, dizziness. You are strong and at the same time open to pain. The slightest wound opens a thousand others.

INTERVIEWER

Does walking on the edge give you a vision?

WIESEL

It provides a vision but not a normal vision. You know the truth, but as I said through one of my characters, it's the truth of a madman. What else is there beyond that knowledge?

INTERVIEWER

Ultimate knowledge?

WIESEL

That is why I am seeking mystical experiences. In mysticism there is always a beyond. It's infinite. In philosophy you stop with a wall, not in mysticism. I know, we know, that knowledge is there. When you see the abyss, and we have looked into it, then what? There isn't much room at the edge—one person, another, not many. If you are there, others cannot be there. If you are there, you become a protective wall. What happens? You become part of the abyss. But the word may be

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misleading. It means many things. Fear. Fear of forgetting. And of remembering. Fear of madness.

INTERVIEWER

You become a wall protecting others from the abyss?

WIESEL

Certainly. Then you become, in the best sense, part of the abyss. You push them away. They don't come too close for the danger is in being immunized. I have some immunity. The madness in me is immunity. It's bad and good. Whatever I could say, the opposite is as true a statement.

INTERVIEWER

Has anyone protected you from the abyss?

WIESEL

In a beautiful way, my son. I can't afford tumbling. If things go badly, I think of my son. Strange, if things go badly or well, I think of two people—my father and my son. Sometimes I see the same gestures in my son. I have protection—my son, my wife, my close friends. I could count them on five fingers.

INTERVIEWER

What about Rav Mordechai Shushani? Where did you and he meet?

WIESEL

We met in Paris and I stayed with him for several years. He was a strange man. A genius who looked like a bum, or a clown. He pushed me to the abyss. But he believed in that. One day I am going to write a monograph about him. His concept was to shock, to shake you up, to push you further and further. If you don't succeed, too bad. But you must risk it. If I had stayed with him longer, I don't know what would have happened.

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INTERVIEWER

Did he push anybody over the abyss?

WIESEL

He did. I heard stories later when I began picking up pieces looking for him. He did it with the best of intentions. Few people have had such an influence on my life as he did.

INTERVIEWER

Who were the others?

WIESEL

Here and there a teacher, a friend. But he is probably the strongest. He's the opposite of Professor Saul Lieberman who is no longer alive, but whom I considered to be the greatest Jewish scholar of his day. One cannot study the Talmud without the help of his commentaries. He was my friend and my teacher. Shushani, on the other hand, was not my friend. Surely he possessed a certain strength and power; so did Professor Lieberman—but his was not frightening.

INTERVIEWER

Where is your quest leading you?

WIESEL

I don't know. I know two things. One, I am going in a concentric circle. That I set out to do. I came from the outside and I am going deeper and deeper. I don't know what I will find there. I know the moment I find the last point, I will stop. Maybe I will never find it. I also know that I haven't begun. It's a strange feeling. I say to myself, you have written this and this and this, and you haven't even begun. That doesn't mean that I deny my work. On the contrary, I stand behind every word I have written. There isn't a book I would not write the same way today. There isn't a story I would disown, not a word. My entire life and entire work are behind every line. At the same time on the edge you see so much. I haven't even begun to communicate what I have seen.

—John S. Friedman

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Alfred Corn

from Notes from a Child of Paradise

Telling our story is . . . painful as anything
I've ever done. More painful than. A lapse
Of time so long and I'd assumed, wrongly,
These subjects for the most part would have lost
Their power to hurt. The truth is, now I wish
They hadn't pled their case to me. The wound
Reopens; so clearly was never healed.
What sort of doctoring is it that wounds?
The question raised experimentally,
Either to prove I should renounce or else
Regain the urgent impulse that made me start.
Words and meanings fall into place as though
They were . . . a solid reason to continue,
Some inkling why I want to give them voice—.
I recall, too, periods doing no work:

It all began to turn adversary,
Went cold and brackish. Those who make and are
Made by art soon lose the power of seeing
Very far without it. Their arm, their grace
In the fast stumble and sprain of circumstance.
Linesmiths, who cannot stop a war, relieve
Suffering, change the law, or be televised
Coast to coast, in one small realm can bargain
For peace between words; can make a heavy sentence
Light; resolve a harsh clash in sound
Or sense; and make our kind of English sing.
Is it a pattern, too, for other projects?
We labor until animal magnetism
Draws us into the spirit of the thing;
Come down with a case of hope; and turn the page.

* * *

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Saint-Gaudens, possibly Hiram Powers
Might have mustered skill and found which deeds
To frieze in marble, the hardship dance of hours
In their long trek upriver to the mountains.
Sacajawea was, I think, once cast
In solo bronze, but never the young captains'
Iconographical self-sacrifice
Portrayed in the eulogy of adamant.
Us, the imperfect was our paradise.
Yet we were always in a way part sculptor,
Fixing pivotal moments in that Trajan's
Column, the passage up from phase to phase
As avatars of higher imaginations—
Not merely some penciled entries in a journal,
But records that eternity still plays.

For those voyages of discovery—
The slowly unfurling story of Ann and Alfred,
Or tracking the sources of the great Missouri,
Or Dante's autobiographical
And catechistic narrative—all strike
The keynotes of a cyclic canon, call
It "Pilgrim achieves a Soul through Steep Progression
Toward Revelation," or "The Passage to
The Garden"—any plot line where a question
Named Time wins certitude by marrying
An errand through Space. Though why selected facts
From private lives, and not some grander thing,
Should go to build that edifice of late
Will have to be worked out by questioners
In other fields . . . Meanwhile an open gate

* * *

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Leads into one distilled from many nights
That winter, sedulous, homey evenings spent
Typing or taking notes for essays; or,
In your case, reading that week's lesser known
Classic. (You'd joined an informal group of bright
Students meeting Mondays, with cheese and wine,
To discuss *Christabel* or *Modern Love.*)
Yes, let's say that Meredith's obsessive
Jamesian antiromance is what you're bent
Over, frowning intelligently there
Within the hot circle of the tensor light.
I stroll over to you, touch your shoulder
And wait ten counts until you lift a face
Still vaguely fogged over with the trance of reading.
"Hm?" you ask; and eyes answer full voice.

No point mentioning again that name
I more and more hear you pronounce (the most
Ambitious of your classmates, they say, plain
But fiendishly gifted, the unofficial chief
Of your cénacle). You smile and arch your brows
Before turning back to the crabbed sonnet.
I've got it, a hint from Mozart. But you soon
Ask to have it replaced by golden silence. . . .
A silence of a different grain than that
That thins out the air of the room six Mondays
Later, when at some small, stifling hour
It dawns on me you won't be coming in
Tonight. Eventually, you phone. I see,
But can't respond directly to the mixed
Keys—challenge, despair—in your voice. "Goodbye."

* * *

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All right. If freedom wants to be fulfilled,
No doubt it needs a household to itself:
Ann finds a studio closer to school;
Al a downtown crashpad in what's being called
The East Village, matrix of the new
Mystic-drug-and-social revolution
(Which can't be launched at uptown rental rates).
They promise they'll commute to see each other;
But as for classes, he simply doesn't go.
No problem. While his right hand dashes off
A few last papers ("Gautier and Baudelaire")
The practiced left twirls tight a cigarette
For impromptu meetings of the *Club*
Du Haschisch. What the A's received might owe
To special illumination, does he care?

He cares about the journey with closed eyes;
About varieties of mystic thought;
About perception, its portals flung wide
To rainwashed color, texture felt in the gut,
Proliferating symmetries, light figures
In the optic carpet, magic, music,
Philosophy at one with the heartbeat,
With the wild torque of the galaxy, dilate
Pupil, wheel within wheel. . . . Even the flower
Tendered by the smiling jeweled devi
Whose precinct's Tompkins Park encapsulates
(Its sunbright disc, its radiating petals)
That first love, the innovating starburst
Of creation, down to the tiny solar flock;
To earth; to flesh; and the mind perceiving all.

* * *

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Flaking plaster. Bathtub in the kitchen.
Closet john, with walls sporting koans
Inscribed by visitors: "The Buddha is dried
Dung," above, "The Buddha is *not* . . . etc."
Mao's Little Red Book hard by
Growing Up Absurd, The Kama Sutra,
The Autobiography of Malcolm X.
Tour of the premises (within a week
You'd come to see what sort of place I lived in)
Began with two rooms bald of furniture,
And then tripped down to the Street. Two doors over,
Paradise Alley basked in its having once
Come up for mention in *Howl.* What's more, the guru
Himself and ponytailed sidekick were often
To be seen shopping at the corner bodega.

Not far away, the "Digger's Free Store,"
For gratis food and clothes. And FILLMORE EAST,
Where fans could hear the new West Coast imports,
Or B.B. King, or themselves become a part
Of the Living Theater's "happening," titled
Paradise Now. . . . We lounged in the orchestra,
Not once flinching as the players, stripped
To cache-sexe and leonine manes, strode down
The aisles and projected in our faces, "I
Am not allowed to travel without a passport!
I'm not allowed to smoke marijuana!"
"Then disobey," came back the shout from some
Of us, who brandished notional texts of Thoreau.
No curtain. But soon we left, pushing outside.
To night, lights, and traffic. We, the living.

* * *

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In due course, I train uptown to check
On how you're coping. What's your news? Oh, nothing.
Well, your colleague has begun to show
His true colors. A bully like them all.
Fresh out, *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts*
Club Band drops to the turntable, spinning
Rueful fables of constraint and freedom.
And gives a hint of having anticipated
(After earlier successes) the slight
Disappointment we feel. Its jacket features
The stars, in psychedelic Salvation Army
Uniform, gazing down at what might
Be their own grave, bloodred hyacinths
Spelling out the name that launched ten million
Discs, and a raft of famous dead behind.

"The love that's gone so cold and the people . . .
And life flows on, within you and without you."
You stretch, begin to do a little housework.
Is this the moment to note again how feeling
Tends to override its simplest settings?
The props, and maybe the actors, too, will seem
To matter less than the high voltage channeled
Through them; so that even here, as you stack
Records and papers, in faded shirt and jeans,
You are all you ever have been, ever.
A votary will need no gilded stage,
No ambrosial music, no holy terrors
To be caught up in a silken spin that makes
The conscript dancer sense his happiest rôle is
To foot a rough equivalent of The Dance.

* * *

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March 26, this 1967.
A blue and sunny Easter morning. And we
Converge on Central Park, in Sheep Meadow,
To pour the crystal vial of our souls
Into an ocean of young elect gathered
Here to demonstrate the power of
Doing whatever pleases you—a new
Abbey of Thélème, uncloistered, motley, free,
And billed "The First Central Park Be-In."
A*L*L*E*N, bearded, in Krishnamurti whites,
Strikes a hand-held gong and leads a chant
Designed to tumble down some towers of
The hostile Jericho, Amerika.
The crowds begin to mill, to shout and run,
A rainbow wave that breaks across the field. . . .

And yet and yet and yet: some part of us
Is not dissolved in the unanimity,
The anonymity; sees little point
In swallowing a daily hallucination;
And flatly disbelieves that Love is all
It takes to stop a war. Granted *something*
Must come to replace their moribund régime;
But sturdy, reasoned, made with, but never solely
Of freedom, pleasure, inwardness and light.
Besides, who can forget the demon, the guard,
The graybeard, and the thief in all of us?
We stroll among much smiling innocence;
Wonder, and doubt. The nature of a trance is
To lift and leave a lucid calm in its wake.
Which finds us turning to go, your hand in mine.

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A Story by Paul Morand

The translator

The author

Photos: © New Directions

Introductory Note

Borealis, *the story which follows, was written by the French short-story writer/academician Paul Morand (1888–1976) and translated in 1922 by Ezra Pound. Never published, the manuscript was discovered in 1976 in Fairfax, Virginia, in a trunk of Pound's—a treasure trove of literary artifacts including letters, proof sheets, drafts of various Cantos, the only surviving manuscript of William Carlos Williams's* The Great American Novel, *previously lost correspondence with T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and a lively exchange between G.B. Shaw and Pound on the subject of Joyce's* Ulysses.

In this extraordinary collection of Poundiana were two Morand manuscripts—translations of two volumes of short stories, Ouvert la Nuit *[Open All Night] and* Tendres Stocks *[Fancy Goods]. Pound became interested in Morand's work when he first arrived in Paris in 1920. Eager to champion those "writing without humbug, without jealousy, and without an eye on any market whatsoever," Pound was particularly impressed by Morand, who, he felt, offered "the first clear eye*

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that had been able to wander about both ends of Europe looking at wreckage."

Morand's most productive literary efforts came after a brilliant early career in the diplomatic service. When Pound first contacted him in 1920 Morand was serving in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris. His first collection, Tendres Stocks, *appeared that year to considerable praise, enhanced by an introduction by Marcel Proust, and in February, 1922,* Ouvert la Nuit *was an instant success. Pound, as the Paris correspondent of* The Dial, *described Morand's rising reputation in his October "Paris Letter."*

In the spring of 1922, Pound signed a contract with the English publishers, Chapman and Dodd, to translate Ouvert la Nuit *and* Tendres Stocks. *Morand was "very glad" to have Pound as a translator and a certain amount of collaboration took place between the two. Pound must have worked at astonishing speed. The completed manuscripts were delivered within a month of the signing of the contracts.*

Almost as quickly, Chapman and Dodd rejected the translations—partly on the grounds of sexual frankness and partly on the advice of A.B. Walkley, a critic who had reviewed Morand for the London Times. *He had written the publishers: "You certainly cannot with credit, or indeed without ridicule, publish this translation." He criticized Pound's carelessness, his vulgarities, his Americanisms, his tastelessness, his lack of understanding of the author's meaning ("absolute howlers")—and then tips his hand by questioning the wisdom of publishing* any *Morand. "I think an English version, however accomplished, couldn't fail to be ugly."*

Pound was understandably furious. He mistakenly thought that J. Middleton Murry, who had reviewed Morand in The Nation, *was Chapman and Dodd's outside reader. He wrote him a tart little note: "Toddle on, and take your little dose of arsenic. Devotedly, E.P."*

Chapman and Dodd compensated Pound for his troubles with a single payment of £25. The translations disappeared into Pound's trunk where they lay undisturbed for over half a century.

—G.A.P.

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Borealis

The Gothic porch was lit by a lamp, 200 candlepower. I stopped on the opposite sidewalk. Men entered, alone; others, with women. I hesitated, my heart beating fast, devoid of heroism, until the arrivals ceased. Ungracious stairs led to a door before which were traces of sawdust. The anteroom smelt of gas and dried sweat. A girl with plaits read my temporary membership card—a small parchment hexagon—and I penetrated to the men's dressing room. Shirts hung there, emptied of bodies; suspenders reposed there; boots lifted their rubber heels, for the Norse foot had not escaped the wave of American exports which burst over Eastern Europe the day after the armistice, in guise of calculating machines, fly-killers, and dental floss. A nickel shoehorn shone from the middle of the floor.

Should I undress here? The notices on the wall doubtless instructed one, but how was one to understand letters that looked like toads and insects, covered over with curlicues, with their innumerable accentuation of pimples and air bubbles? I removed my shoes and half opened the door. The costume was of mosque rather than of club, for I caught sight of two members in what I may call the requirements. One faced me, leaning sideways on a balustrade. A wisp of hair, wound about his head like a fungus, gave the first slender promise of the white beard which flowed downward over his chest, there mingling with a thick tufty growth such as one sees in secondhand shops bulging out of old sofas. Thence the body hair divided itself into two regular strips, edging, each, one side of the stomach. It foamed for an instant, then subsided in ivylike fantasy about the legs and terminated its course with the feet. His interlocutor faced him, thus having his back to me. He had black unbendable hair. The branches of gold spectacles glittered behind his ears. He also was naked and moved the big toe of his right foot in rhythm.

I closed the door and sat down. I should have had no difficulty in stripping or in moving naked; since childhood I

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have known fencing schools, sporting clubs, swimming pools, and Turkish baths. Neither did I fail to remember that I was here of my own free will, having asked for admission as a foreign member to the Diana Bund, or Society of Diana.

Without going back to the fifteenth century, when, after the Hussite schism, people in Bohemia founded sects favoring Adamic nudity as a means of salvation (which proved in the end only a means of getting massacred), I had heard often of Germanic groups whose members assemble in order to live without clothing. The reading of a Teutonic review consecrated to the propagation of nudity and to questions of aesthetics and hygiene, i.e., eugenics, had put me on the track and indicated to me the existence of Nordic branches of this new mutuality: Nacktkultur. An ad in the Swedish review *Beauty* finished the matter:

"Persons of both sexes, of Aryan race, desiring to join a serious society whose aims are those of the review *Beauty*, are invited to write to P.O. Box 78, at . . . . . Branches in Nordic countries."

Being later in . . . . . , I wrote to the indicated address, enclosing a stamp for reply and received a letter-card whereon a Dr. Vulpius requested me to explain more clearly my reasons for wishing to join the Society and to state my age, profession, etc. I sent the doctor a declaration of principles in harmony with the review, citing the great ancient civilizations, the festivals of Sparta, the laws of Lycurgus, the Germans of Tacitus's time. I animadverted also, from a medical point of view, on the benefits derivable from the chemical effects of sun on the cuticle.

They gave me a rendezvous, for two days later, at the Café Odin, first floor, Prince Alexander Room, where there was to be an evening of lectures with lantern slides and at which I would meet the executive committee.

It was seven in the evening, after dinner. The café opened on the wood port. Norwegian sailing ships with icy spars, a lone reminder of snow recently melted, raised their crosstrees level with the double windows from which the paper glued

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there to keep out the cold had not yet been torn away. A night breeze distorted the waves between us and some islands which sloped gently into the water, at an angle taken also by the launching ways freighted with freshly caulked keels flaming with red lead and the sunset.

The president (Dr. Vulpius, as I learned) was blind and supported a pair of black spectacles upon a landscape of facial blotches. He discoursed solemnly from the center of the platform, flanked by the vice-president and the treasurer. The latter was a tortoise-headed blonde, doubtless an officer's widow, wearing glasses and terminating in a hat bordered with jonquils. Her eye cast forth its scrutative beam to-me-ward, and it sank in like a grappling iron. Like a boarding party, her thought rose to encounter my thought, and I felt that my admission depended, in ultimate, on this vigilant guardian of the nunnery's turning-box.

I used English for my explanation. My remarks were translated to a young girl concealed behind the paper of her typewriter. This secretary then expressed herself in the dialect of the locality. My French citizenship aroused more interest than sympathy and stirred them to no trust.

"Is it clearly understood that no curiosity of an immoral nature has moved you to ask for admission to this Society?"

"We admit only persons of proved respectability, who are not given to drink or to Theosophy, who do not read immoral books, and who have regular incomes."

The assessor on the right, a red-bearded man of forty, wearing a frock coat, with politeness pursued the examination.

"Do you associate with Russians? Or Jews?"

After I had shown my passport and made a deposit, the jury deliberated in an undertone. Then the typewriter clicked.

"You will be admitted for two months, after you have passed the medical examination. You will be given a visitor's membership. Will you please wait in the anteroom?"

I rose as the door opened. The typist entered, offering me an envelope and a smile, from which I gathered that the sen-

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tence was favorable. All the bashfulness was on my side. The prestige of a serious manner, of these silences, of these frank and natural gestures, is sudden. My sympathy moved toward her instantly. She had blue eyes bordered with black lashes falling evenly as a fringe, a courteous mouth, and short hair tinseled with pale refractions.

I was on the point of getting excited, of bursting into conversation, but she suddenly clicked her heels together and made me an adorable, extremely rapid low bow—a sort of shiver from calves to pate. Her hair flopped forward, shaking over her forehead, and she left the room without speaking.

The next day I passed the medical examination in a suburban hospital full of lice left by Kronstadt refugees. I was examined by a doctor and consultants. The process was speedy, but rigorous. All contagious diseases, including bad breath and intestinal worms, ended one's chances, likewise any skin trouble or any physical deformity likely to damage the aesthetic pleasure of one's fellow members.

I was received, permitted to pay my subscription and to acquaint myself with the bylaws. My anxiety increased on reading and inwardly marking that: "The least infraction of the Society's ideal, or any indecency likely to shock the delicacy of the members, leads to instant expulsion."

Thus and now with no other garment than a turquoise ring, I might, with head held high, enter the hall of games where twice weekly the members of the Diana Bund strip themselves and pass an evening in the costume of Paradise. I was about to be one of them. The thing was sanctioned by the police and considered perfectly natural, without seeming, to me, wholly so. Admittedly, my apprehension diminished upon remembering earlier Nordic experiences—mixed sunbaths on the German strands of the Baltic, Swedish hydrotherapies wherein one is delivered to gentle feminine hands that seem to have been worn down by soap, Russian bathing beaches where I had seen men and their companions scorched and naked, with arms around each other's waists in island waters blue as your fountain pen's ink. The idea of finding

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myself among wives and young ladies was, for all that, disturbing. I half opened the door again. On the platform with its adornment of flags, golden palms, snakes pickled in oil, a third conversationalist had joined the two others. He wore, slung around his neck, a black shagreen case revealing the form of a reservoir pen, but there could be no question of underdrawers or of a towel for even a neophyte; time was moving. I was, obviously, the last to unclothe. I entered the hall with measured tread, resolute, with a dry throat and hands clenched.

I noticed at once a "restauration" where naked families in rattan armchairs partook of radishes and café au lait. It was as in the Turkish bath, after the hot room. A lady who held her knitting propped against her abdomen appeared to me as an evil dream. I heard calls, cries; the floor shook with stamping. Balls rolled with the noise of thunder, smashing the ninepins. I found myself in the center of a glass-covered hall, walled with pine planks, smeared with yacht varnish, like everything else in that country. Forty people of both sexes were taking exercise. A group of men did the high jump over a rope that was moved up two centimeters at a time. A naked gentleman looking like the king of Sweden wrecked in revolution, phlegmatically adjusted it after each turn. I concentrated my attention upon them forcibly, thus keeping it off the opposite sex. The gymnastic appliances were at the other end of the room. In the sawdust, isolated amateurs raised and lowered themselves or limbered their dorsal muscles with Indian clubs. Youthful athletes cast javelins against mattresses. In the pauses, they imbibed ice water, rinsed their mouths therewith, and spat it far from them on the floor. Elderly ladies maneuvered hexagonal promenades on one foot, or executed triangular hop-skips as if they were victims of some system of penitence.

The shock of trapeze rings clacking together drew my attention. I lifted my eyes, which until then had been lowered in nunlike abasement, and saw suspended above me a curious ball of limbs, knotted together, with round knees and sharp elbows projecting. The object slowly revolved over itself, a

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pink rump rose from the projections of vertebrae, impelled by the wrist muscles, a straining of the neck forced a head through ash-blonde forelocks which were caught back by a large black silk ribbon bow. It smiled, and I recognized Dr. Vulpius's typist—precisely the one from whom I had received my certificate. She paused, froglike, in her rings, indolent, sinuous, at her ease, the smile dropping upon me from her Nordic and goblin, fresh, irregular face. I felt needle points under my scalp. Again the blonde head plunged earthward, the arms opened at right angles; stretched out and above this axis, the body sought a deliberate readjustment; the legs came together and reached the floor in a quarter circle.

I had then before me the body of an adolescent athlete which left no room for improvement. I dared not take my eyes from the face. The damsel smiled and saluted me. I felt her breath on my arms. I cut short the pantomime, brusquely turned my back on her, rushed to the high jump, and joined the persevering squad. I leapt to the springboard like a dervish—my foot caught in the rope, I went flat, smashed my nose, arose with satisfaction and with bleeding hands. I felt the need of continuing, of not letting my eyes return toward the female. What eyes! I fell upon the trapeze. I straddled the parallel bars. What lips, what lip corners! And so clement! I lifted the forty-pound dumbbells. What a breast without blemish! I embarked on a series of jumps, wherein my Aryan energy won the esteem of all present. Short-winded, out of training, sweating, I had to stop before long. And she, she was before me! Eve with bobbed hair, without embarrassment, shameless before the fall, stretching out arms not humped into biceps and triceps but covered with the long flowing muscles, such as one sees in swimmers. I was breathless.

"My name is Aïno," she said, using German for this explanation. "My parents ask if you will take a glass of tea with us."

I delivered myself to her guidance. A fat man whose fleece obscured any precise silhouette, her father, politely invited me to be seated. Director of the Baltika Hereditas Insurance Co. The young brother was squeezing spring dumbbells to

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develop his hand muscles. The mother held her two plate-sized breasts firmly between her two elbows. She was reading Fichte and gave me a hyacinth to smell. Her arms were still young, only the faces and belly were wrinkled. I reached for my trouser pockets and found none in my thighs. Sneezed.

She said: "You'll soon get used to doing without your clothes. We live this way at home. In summer we go naked to pick strawberries, and in winter we break a hole in the ice to go bathing. The antique Beauty is not extinct, as the Lutherans tell you. No, Monsieur. She is like the swallows who, as our peasants believe, pass the winter in the lake bottoms and who always return."

She spoke to her young son: "If you bite your nails, you'll ruin your hands, and then you'll be thrown down the big well."

It was all going so nicely. I took tea with lemon, in the midst of these robust burghers in whom one could perceive respectable habits and a certain prosperity. Café au lait, cucumbers, and acacia fritters fit for the Scandinavian gods were offered on giant reed hurdles. The father took a fancy to me and showed me the ravine which a most unusual operation had left in his abdomen. His company would insure, upon request, against appendicitis, with underwriting by Lloyd's. He spoke of the nutritive power of vegetables. I looked, in secret, at Aïno. When I met her eyes, or when my pleasure became excessive, I turned my gaze against some counterfeit corpus, I lowered it against the deformed feet of my interlocutors, between which naked infants struggled, toppled over by monstrous heads, and wallowed like lion cubs. No longer fearful of being judged heretic, I resisted no inquiry, forbade myself no exploration. The worst, I thought, must be over.

Then someone ordered collective games. Cat and mouse produced no disorder. We formed a great circle. The cat tried to catch the mouse; we delayed the cat with a thousand obstructions. We laughed, puffed. There was an armistice. The game of fox and geese followed; a sort of human chain, a sportive snake dance in which each person grasped firmly the

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waist of the person antecedent. The fox tried to capture the gosling. The line undulated, gave way, and reformed in its attempt to save the prey from the hunter. Aïno was behind me. Her hands cut into my flanks like hot knives. She laughed and told me not to give way. I avoided her contact, thus anchoring myself more firmly to a young blonde female, ugly, solid as a bridge pile, who bent her legs to lower her center of gravity and offer less prize to the bumps. Conscientious and lymphatic, she pushed out an enormous rump which veritably creaked with the effort. My recoil from this pressed Aïno against me. The struggle for the moment was especially active. I felt her arms round my waist, all her body was crushed against mine with an unbearable leverage, her panting breast was pasted into my back. I closed my eyes and a curious restlessness came upon me. It was shame unspeakable and uncomfortable, mixed with a sort of drowsiness. I wanted to stay there all my life. The chain almost broke at every new buffet. With a sudden movement, I let go my hold on the fat girl and broke loose also from Aïno. I leapt from the crowd, casting no glance behind me, ascended the stairs with impetuosity, and closed the door of the dressing room firmly.

In the street the cold came against my cheeks like the charge from a gun loaded with rock salt. I felt light as a pigeon and wholly soaked with electricity.

❄

I met Aïno two days later, in a bun shop.

"You don't recognize me?"

"Almost. If you are Aïno, you have beauty spots on your right breast and left shoulder. But who can tell in these clothes?"

"What do you wear that hair for? A man ought to shave his head every morning. You don't wear a slide chain around your neck with a private diary at the end of it? How far can you throw the hammer? Do you always walk round-shouldered?"

I urged her to dine with me or anyhow to make a date.

"I'll come for you tomorrow with the motorcycle. We'll go to G . . . for St. John's Eve. Bring a suitcase."

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We crossed the town, nodding at every bump; the horn obtained us a passage, as it were, in thin slices. The bystanders offered little resistance. When the tramway blocked the pebbled street, we veered toward the sidewalk, grazing old impotent cabs painted in raw color, squashed down under their astrakhan-capped coachmen; from beneath the troika yokes, the little horses shook their forelocks and turned red eyes upon us. We went by curious buildings—the court house, the prefecture of police, Greek temples dating from the first Russian occupation. In the façades of German shipping offices stood bearded caryatids—the directors, apparently—naked from the waist up. Under a punishing wind they sold all sorts of things made of birchwood, valises, bicycles, beds; in the shops, the imports, canned tongue, and safety razors with the portrait of General Krabb tied to each by yellow ribbons. Our reflection covered most of the windows. It slid over them, confusing the products inside or enveloping them in its transparency. Me in the red-varnished coffin, with disheveled projecting hair, streaming eyes; the wheel made oval by the pace showed under my cramped legs, and above my flat image rose Aïno's—green sweater, legs booted up to the hips in oiled leather, her short hair torn by the wind, softening with its blonde luster, a pleasant dementia; the dark malevolent mask of barred spectacles muzzling the upper part of her face and fitting down to the line of her mouth, heavy, young, reassuring. Aïno drove the cycle with concentration, insensitive to the smell of rank oil or the banging of defective explosions, shutting off the spark and my breath simultaneously at the crossroads, more often jamming on the brake, glancing over her thigh at the exhaust or smiling at me under her elbow.

There were no suburbs. The country began, straight away, at the ground floor of a five-story house. A few clouds dropped their carpet of shadows on the roadway. The sky above the lakes was so clear that the sea gulls showed crow-black against it. Still wireless masts rose from the roofs of a few places belonging to the owners of the paper factory. We crossed athletic grounds set in the clearings of pine woods; the athletes were there at practice. We scorched down a sort

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of torn ribbon that flattery might have labeled a road. I bent over, twisted my sides, lifted myself by my hands to lessen the jolting. Aïno grinned; the nearer I came to being thrown off, the better she liked it. She encouraged me with phrases lost on the wind. Later, nothing but silver birches, black rimmed, a vegetable funeral notice, interrupted by pools girded with rheumatic willows, twisted, arthritic; drowned tree trunks drifted toward the sawmills, a promise of so many pink-headed matches.

I had left the Champs-Élysées a month before, the trees were already giving shade; the Ambassadeurs was being repainted, banners flowered before the Salon; the tire-polished asphalt flowed down to the Concorde, like deep water. And I regretted it all. Nothing but birches. I would have given my life for a chestnut tree. The cupolas were green in Dresden, the lilacs had flowered; in Sweden they were unscrewing the icebreakers, they were putting the yachts in commission; here these trees had leaves in small format. Going north in this way was like running the Spring film backwards. Still the birches (this time the slim trunks cut into wood piles), locomotives drawing them stacked on flatcars and ringing a bell as they pulled. Green and russet smoke belched from the bell-mouthed smokestacks, less pleasing to the eye than blue coal smoke, but bringing back to us, lapped on the wind, the sharp intoxicating perfume of vegetation. Wooden scaffolds for the ski matches stretched up uselessly, stripped by the thaw and showing the undersides of their framework.

I was happy. I took Aïno's hand and stroked her wrist very gently, thus cutting off the spark and stopping the cycle abruptly. I clasped her in my arms. She stood up on the pedals, pushed the goggles back on her forehead, broke her comb, tried to tidy her hair with spread fingers.

"A French girl wouldn't do this, eh? I had a French friend once. Her head was so big she was always falling over herself. She couldn't hold anything in her hands; her gloves, her sachet, or her handbag, something was always falling off her, like a ripe fruit, when she moved."

"My friends," I replied with annoyance, "order their clothes

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by telephone, scrub floors, and never have bellyaches. But none of them has your complete dearth of eloquence, or such sunburn, or a body that will slide through trapeze rings like cashmere."

And to be even with her: "I thought your compatriots ate soap and worshiped crow-headed idols."

This wooden house, painted the color of bull's blood, with white framed windows, perched on chunks of granite, is the G. . . They had scratched the Russian lettering off the door.

Our two rooms were so near together, so identical with their yellow curtains, their furniture of silky birch, their towering white porcelain stoves, their double windows with hyacinths growing between them, that I would soon be unable to distinguish one from the other. It was so clean, I didn't know where to put my cigarette ash.

"We'll have a cold supper and then go to bed."

"So soon?" I said. "Hadn't we better wait until dinner time?"

She smiled. I looked at my watch and found that it was eleven in the evening.

The table swarmed like a fishnet with salmon, speckled trout, herring, anchovies in packets of six, their tails tied together; the drink was milk and beer of an unfermented variety. I drew a flask of Norwegian brandy out of my sponge bag. Aïno clapped her hands, uncorked the bottle with a hair pin, sneezed with pleasure. She filled two glasses level, offered me one, took the other, stood at attention, clicked her heels and her tongue, and emptied her glass instantly, bowed and turned the bottom of it toward me with some unintelligible salutation. She had removed her hip boots and put on a house frock covered with peasant embroidery; a necklace of vegetable ivory wandered over her like a sort of vague second dentition. We ate in silence like a couple of Britishers. Aïno's cheeks shone, without rouge powder, like all other Scandinavian faces in which the quick blood spreads its cosmetic, enforced by the open air or by the least trifling attention. Two bottles yielded their eloquence. Our heads were buzzing.

The laws demand temperance. But they like a foreigner to

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arrive at table with bottles of Benedictine. Drunk by glassfuls, it adds savor to the fish diet. I have heard that good fortune has thus been found for small outlay, though the man who said it added that it was, for all that, expensive. My suitcase held a small cellar. I made several cocktails, complicated and despotic: a "corpse-waker" I had learned from the barman in the Grand Hotel, Stockholm, an "interior caress" picked up in Denmark. Aïno imbibed them with simplicity, contentment, and a calm which prevented me from asking her to take her chemise off. She wandered around the table, composing piscine sonatas, her feet dragging from wearing snowshoes all winter. When she came near me, I insisted upon the strength of my desire to plant a kiss on her nostrils. She made no objection. Her flesh gave off the odors of tar and encaustic. I took her head in my hands and enumerated her features. She was the Mongolian type, flat nosed with the sunken eyes which make her compatriots look like vermilioned Chinese.

I emitted the stupid Occidental interrogatory: "And your family?"

"It's St. John's Eve. They'll think I'm sleeping at G. . ."

I was moved by the grace of this rectitude, by these savage confessions, by this whole system that we have so long dreamed of substituting for our pretexts, our indirectnesses and the threadbareness of our fables.

Like the night, hypocrisy was here reduced to nothing—baths of frankness, baths of the midnight sun.

"Aïno, you are not in a sweat, you do not indulge in the cruel pleasure of doubting me, you demand nothing of the stars; you are without guile, without chignon; in Paris my friends would take you for a glorified laundress. You are a young girl, and yet you do not look like a decoy; others call themselves musicians until eleven P.M. You stand solid on your legs, you don't sprain your ankles, you don't wear out the carpet in front of your looking glass."

"I like Frenchmen, because they never give a girl five minutes peace."

"Yes, we manage to have a good time in Paris—on condition that we take them out in the afternoon, entertain them

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in the evening, caress them at night, let them alone in the morning. And then, none of our blondes is really blonde, blonde like this."

"Blasphemy!"

"I adore sunburn, black-and-blue marks on the skin, scratches on the knees, the marks of kisses, sunstrokes, skin that stays white under the hair, everything that you are, your modesty, your consistency, your fingers without rings. I have passed the age when a man thinks he's the only one a woman has ever fallen in love with."

I held her large red hand, content with having already seen Aïno naked, sure there was no mistake possible, no possible sideslip. I knew what was before me. None of the calamities hidden beneath faked pretenses, such as I had suffered aforetime, the rodomontade of dresses, the ingenuity of veils in fragile penumbras, the chemise that they will keep on till the last, like a conjurer's handkerchief, to facilitate their devices.

Aïno had started to give me a full list of all the fauna of the country, of all the animals who live on islands and fish who live in pools so exactly suited to them in each case that one would think the former had been made out of the earth of which the latter had been relieved. Penguins set on cliffs of guano, like jars in a pharmacy, beavers with pompadours, owls, grand dukes in white cotton wool, seals oiled up like cannon, brown bears who scratch the northernmost trees of the planet, horned reindeer among the granites, all the glacial splendor, the ceremonies of the thaw, the magic of their summer.

"Got any whiskey?" said Aïno. "I love whiskey. When I can't get it, I drink toothwash. Makes me feel that I am sa-a-a-iling."

I noticed for the first time that she was drunk. But she neither laughed loudly, broke her glass with her teeth, or took off her shoes under the table; she went on munching insipid watery pickles, drying her mouth on a paper napkin, kissing me full on the lips, and calling me "Püppchen." There it was: the desired moment—when the Poles tell you about the jewels they have stolen, when the Germans copy out verses,

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when the Americans tell you to put out the Negroes, when the Negresses yield to engineers, when the Spaniards object to being kissed because "the lips were made to receive the Holy Communion;" when the English ask for their money.

I wanted to take her in my arms. She made an effort to rise, went limp, said: "But-t-I-am-not . . ." fell on the floor, with arms stretched.

I laid her on the bed. She breathed heavily. Her frock opened like bark. I saw once more the breasts firmly attached to the shoulders by pectoral muscles made strong with rowing. I put a cold water compress on her forehead. Her legs were open and full of shadow.

She said, "No." She half opened her eyelids, glued together like those of a newborn kitten, sat up and wanted to vomit.

Spike-shod constellations shone already upon us. The accordion lost its breath now and then, twisted, like a cut worm. Aïno and I stood at the bow of the ferryboat. Similar couples laughed, the gulls likewise. We were now halfway to the islands whence stray phrases, fragments of noise, already reached us. The tips of the pine trees were turning purple.

Aïno had slept till midday, had got up once to drink two quarts of water. She searched my pockets and found a flask of Josephine brandy. I threatened to throw it overboard. She looked up at me with the transparent eye of Virginia and butted me like a goat.

I was still annoyed that she had escaped, thanks to this lethargy. Her silence was like the mute reproach of indigènes: "Wicked white man, you brought the firewater." I thought I had better explain.

"My country is the land of the wine, of temperance, of sociabil . . ."

"Don't quarrel, one mustn't quarrel on St. John's Night."

The caged sun went down between tree trunks, like a red slice of beetroot. The ferryboat came into dock. Two anchors fell from its nostrils. It was midnight, the hour of strangeness, orange-hued, striped russet with zebra stripes. Columns of steam rose from the lakes. We took a path on which fish-

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bones, bits of paper, lace edgings of underwear, became fewer. A glare of bonfires lit on giant granites spread over the island. Other flames drifted on the water.

"Stop," said Aïno near the fountain which strengthens the sight. "These fires are in imitation of the sun and are meant to incite his return; these stones are sexual symbols."

"I would rather," I answered tartly, "you went on calling me Püppchen."

On the ground, in the shadow, couples were conciliating each other, silent, insensible to our presence, shut from the world by pleasure as if by a solid wall. We stepped over them. Elsewhere the sports were more noisy, there were songs, pistol shots. Under the sorb trees, young girls divided grass blades between them for divination. The smell of hot pine needles and roasting brioche came to us. People were jumping into the fires with legs and arms spread, making wishes in the midst of the flames. Fabulous shadows stalked over the earth or struggled between the blazes.

I urged Aïno to tell me her life story. She was studious but fanciful, "chimérique." Last year she had been secretary to the Boundary Commission and had, on that occasion, treated with the Bolsheviks. She had had a uniform with gold braid made for her in Stockholm and a two-pointed hat with vulture feathers, which she wore on the day of the signing. Feeling, suddenly, that her middle was more comfortable, she noticed that I had unhooked her dress during the narration.

I mumbled in circumlocution.

"I never undress except with the family," said Aïno.

Then we sat in the middle of a clearing. Cows emitted the odor of sour milk, and one smelt it thus close to the earth. We heard the tender groans by which the women were inciting their large-handed, lethargic companions. Someone fell with a raucous cry into an abyss, invisible; bones crackled like dead wood breaking.

"What are you thinking?" said Aïno.

"The simple grandeur of these saturnalia moves my French soul," I responded, "which is salacious, deceptive, indiscreet. I have known the parks in New York—in August they are

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open all night to the public. In the warm dampness the greenswards become provisory cemeteries where workmen lie in their shirts with the Irish girls. Now and again a Neapolitan mechanic lifts up his tenor voice; the Slavs sing sometimes in chorus. In Hyde Park in winter, couples sit with mouths joined, amid the sheep, with fog up to their shoulders, enjoying themselves under the noise of the Salvation Army. In Madrid, in Plaza de Recoletos, behind the autos from the Ritz, muleteers in black velvet refresh themselves in the calico petticoats of two-penny whores. In Tahiti, damp herds of women swim out to the boats and board them. In Paris, in the ditches of the fortifications, kinky-haired youths . . ."

Aïno threw her arms round my neck.

"You are an international pig," said Aïno.

I took her in my arms. She remained there for the rest of the night; that is to say for something under ten minutes, for the sun, after a rapid ablution, was already upon us.

translated by Ezra Pound

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Susan Minot is working on a book of fiction to be published by Dutton. She lives in New York City.

Paul Morand's book of short stories, *Fancy Goods/Open All Night*, translated into English by Ezra Pound, with a preface by Marcel Proust, will be published this spring by New Directions. The book is edited and introduced by Breon Mitchell, chairman of the Comparative Literature program at Indiana University.

Ellis Weiner is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in numerous publications including *The New Yorker* and the *National Lampoon*.

Rudy Wilson is in the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa. He is currently working on a novel based on "Impressions."

POETRY

Michael Benedikt, a past poetry editor of *The Paris Review*, is the author of several books of poems and editor of the noted anthology, *The Poetry of Surrealism*. He lives in New York.

Lavina Blossom is a graduate student at the University of Utah at Salt Lake City.

Hayden Carruth, author of many books of poems, teaches at Syracuse University.

Amy Clampitt's first book, *The Kingfisher* (Knopf) was nominated for the 1984 National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry. A new collection will appear next fall. Ms. Clampitt lives in New York.

Alfred Corn's book-length poem, *Notes From a Child of Paradise*, will be published this spring by Viking. The selections here come from Book II of the poem. Mr. Corn lives in New York.

Tom Disch, another New Yorker, is the author of *Burn This*, *ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ*, collections of poems, and several novels.

Andrew Motion is a young Englishman, the author of several collections published by the Salamander Press in Edinburgh. A volume of his selected work, *Dangerous Play*, will soon be published by Salamander and in paperback by Penguin. He lives in Wiltshire.

Yannis Ritsos is one of Greece's leading poets. He lives in Athens, and wrote these poems while living under house-arrest on the island of Samos, in 1970. **Martin McKinsey**, his translator, is a poet from Somerville, Massachusetts.

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Molly Russakoff, who lives in Philadelphia, has published her poetry in several little magazines. She is currently writing a book about poetic meter, *The Little Book of Meter*, and is starting a small press.
Jordan Smith's first book, *An Apology for Loving The Old Hymns*, was published by Princeton. He teaches at Union College in Schenectady, New York.

INTERVIEWS

Jordan Elgrably is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*, among other publications. He lives in Paris, France.
John S. Friedman is a journalist specializing in politics and culture. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Nation*, *American Film*, the Baltimore *Sun*, and other publications. Co-publisher of *Shantih*, a journal of international literature and art, he holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature.

ART

Jennifer Bartlett was born in Long Beach, California, in 1941, and lives in New York and Paris. Her work has been exhibited internationally, including recent exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Tate Gallery, London, and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.
David Bowes was born in Boston in 1957, and lives in New York. An exhibition of his paintings was recently held at the Annina Nosei Gallery, New York.
Roy Lichtenstein was born in New York in 1923, and lives in Southampton, New York. Major traveling retrospective exhibitions of his paintings, sculpture, and drawings have been organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1969), and the St. Louis Art Museum (1981). A recent exhibition of paintings was held at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
Tom Otterness was born in Wichita, Kansas, in 1952, and lives in New York. A recent exhibition of sculpture and drawings was held at Brooke Alexander Gallery, New York.

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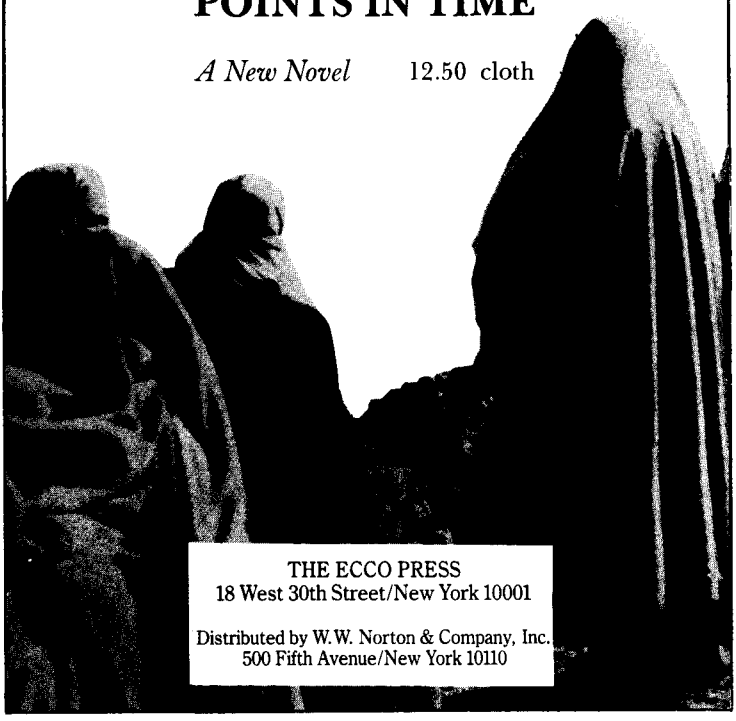

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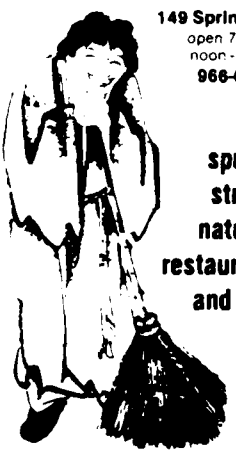

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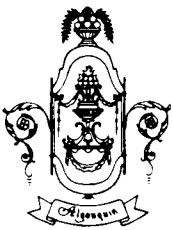

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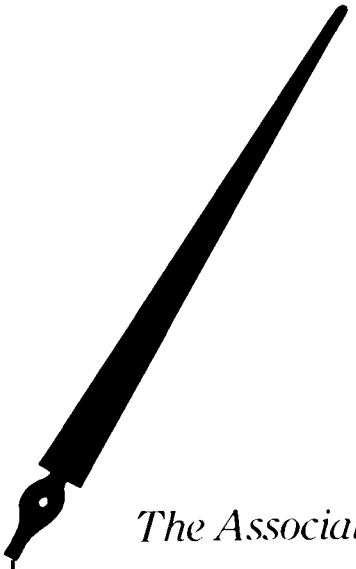

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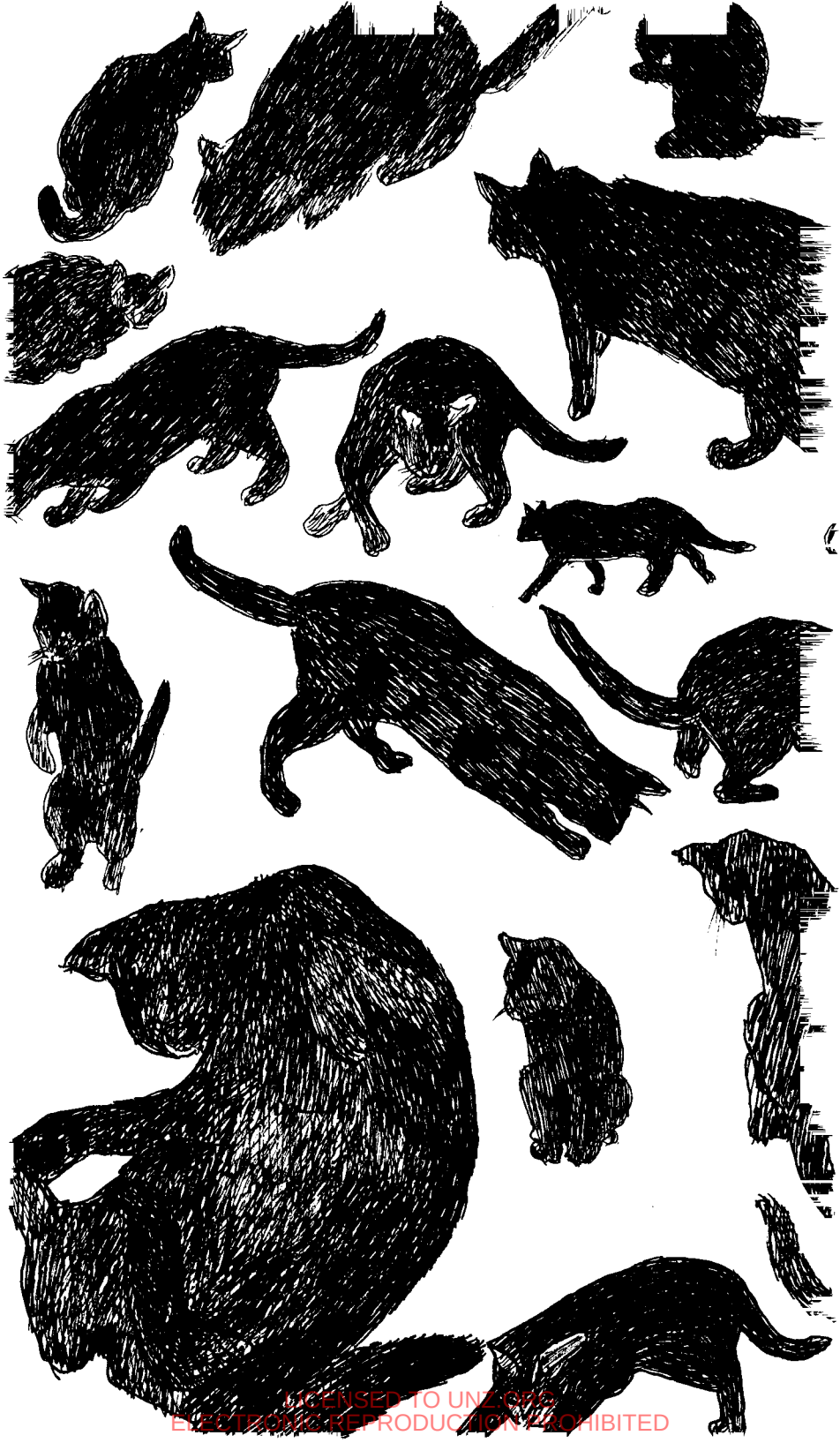

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